DECIPHERED HISTORY

Hugo Noel Santander Ferreira

EDITORIAL
SANTALEY

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History Deciphered

A Brief Spiritual History of the World

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To Yahweh,
who also granted me these insights

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In his quae fiunt in tempore, leguntur aeterna.

In what happens in time, the eternal is read.

— St. Augustine
The City of God, Book XV, Chapter 8

Prólogo

This book lays claim to an original figure: the poet as prophet. In an age when the poetic word often retreats into ornament or intimacy, these pages restore its primordial function: revelation, announcement, warning. Here, the poet recovers his essential vocation: to see before, to name before, to transmit what has not yet taken historical form. From the exile and restitution of the poet Nol-Hu in the court of the Yellow Emperor to the continental voice of Pablo Neruda encoding love and oblivion in an immortal verse, poetry reappears as an act of mediation between the human and the eternal. The poem asserts itself as an instrument of knowledge, as an embodied sentence, as testimony that precedes chronicle and guides the memory of peoples.

This book proposes itself, above all, as an act of reading the world. Already from the Author's Warning, history presents itself not as a dusty archive, but as a living text, woven of symbols, figures, and resonances awaiting recognition. The premise is clear and profound: human experience participates in a spiritual drama of long duration, where every civilization, every myth, and every individual destiny constitutes letters and paragraphs of a greater writing called to be deciphered.

From its opening pages, *The Creator, Evolutionist* unfolds the divine patience that shapes the cosmos across immense eras. Creation reveals itself as a prolonged work that teaches man the supreme virtue of contemplative rest, where ethical action reveals itself as the root of joy or suffering. *Original Sin* inaugurates responsibility and grants knowledge a central place in the architecture of the spirit. *Superiority of Neanderthal Man* deciphers the causes of our

anxiety, blaming our ancestors who chose violent hunting over agriculture and, with it, crime—opposed to the pacifist precepts of universal coexistence proper to animals and to our already annihilated Neanderthal man.

The symbolic constructions of humanity reach their height in *Tower of Babel or of Absolute Ideologies*. There, the desire for totality reveals the irreducible diversity of human voices, where populist ideals of replacing God fail due to the meanness of men. After mythical cataclysms, *Of the Actors from the Fall and Ruin of Atlantis* affirms the perpetual rebirth of politics in those actors who best represent the ruling class. *Forgiveness, Legacy of Israel* transforms justice into historical wisdom and unites peoples through a luminous teaching. *Origin of the Amazons* discovers in otherness an inexhaustible source of creative force.

Moses, Destroyer of the Bronze Age acts as a threshold of epoch. He introduces decisive mutations in time, law, and community, and announces the emergence of a renewed historical consciousness. *Plato's Secret Slave* dialogues with diverse traditions and reveals AI as a facade of ancient forms of assistance, learning, or slavery. *Death of the Messiah* condenses in a single destiny the teaching that consciousness is sustained in faith, and *Judas Iscariot, Martyr of Sinners* elevates sacrifice to an act of testimony that summarizes two thousand years of cruelties in a life of eternal remorse.

Imperial cycles unfold in *Fall of the Roman Empire*, where Gibbon's vast work is condensed into an essential page. *History of the Exile and Restitution of the Poet Nol-Hu* embodies exile and the triumph of poetry as essential movements of the creative spirit. *Salvation of Christianity before the Pagan Avalanche* stages faith as a light capable of educating the violent and dispelling darkness. *Medieval Princess* embodies the continuity of life and the representation of

misunderstood filial love, this time no longer by a mad British king but by a queen who admires only wealth.

Ethereal Libraries present knowledge as a divine legacy that exalts dreams and allows one to inhabit reality as the visible face of Janus's gaze. *Holy Grail* elevates symbols with a vocation of universality and reveals the desire for order that harmonizes civilizations. *Saint Francis and the Animals* turns communion with nature into a form of holiness and makes all creation a shared praise. *Suicide of the Mayas* elevates Mayan peace to its culmination in a collective sacrifice of dignity, where mathematical wisdom is transfigured into prophecy of eternal rest and concord prevails as the supreme form of freedom.

Covering of America reveals discoveries as thresholds where otherness disrupts millennial precepts of identity, and *Fabrication of Quetzalcóatl* fuses in the Feathered Serpent the feminine and the masculine, wound and perfection, elevating the sacred to universality. Literature reaches a theological dimension in *William Shakespeare, Scribe of the Holy Spirit*, where inspiration imposes itself on the author and theater rises as a mirror of the human condition. *Cervantes and García Lorca* fuse tradition and innovation, uniting La Mancha and Granada in a sensibility that deciphers centuries.

Roberto de Nobili, Ecumenical Reformer embodies cultural harmony by adapting liturgy to local customs and demonstrating that wisdom flourishes in encounter. *Baruch de Espinosa* contemplates in every creature a receptacle of the Creator and turns nature into a sanctuary where man recreates the world with compassion. *The Vizier's Fly* transforms the minimal into revelation, and *The Bewitched King* purifies the duality of power through suffering. *Bell of Emperor Yongle* perpetuates imperial majesty in the echo of metal and in the sacrifice that aspires to the consummation of spurned love.

Philip IV's Linguistic Decree consecrates diversity by showing that the word lives in the mouth of the people and that unity arises through creative imitation. *Nietzsche's Last Battle* transfigures reason into vital ethics and turns inner struggle into spiritual victory. *Vision of Tsar Nicholas* unites the temporal with the eternal and reveals in visionary experience a design that culminates in mercy. *The Astrologer* connects the human microcosm with the divine macrocosm through stars that allow themselves to be read, but never dominated.

The Progeny of the Mongols transforms warrior lineages into guardians of wisdom and sublimates biological inheritance into spiritual legacy. *Why the Army of the British Empire Was Saved at Dunkirk* testifies to the convergence between human strategy and providential design in an unexpected gesture of humanity. *Marilyn Monroe, Queen of Babylon* elevates beauty to a symbol of transcendence and turns sacrifice into philanthropic offering. *The Queen Mother* embodies inner conviction that crowns more than any throne and preserves the madness of lineage. *Pablo Neruda, Latin Poet* fuses the telluric and the universal, elevating the voice of the continent to a rereading of vital poetry.

The Manufacturer reflects in artisanal making the primordial creative act and turns repair into a parable of God. *Reading and Meditation, According to Buddha* refines the spirit through contemplation and teaches one to inhabit the present with its alterations of meaning. *Martyrdoms of John Lennon and Princess Diana* condense entire eras into individual destinies and elevate sacrifice to an announcement of collective redemption.

This volume offers an experience of narrative thought. Forty texts trace a journey through the moments when history acquires symbolic density and the word recovers its original power. The reader gains access to a

sequence of visions that order the past and project it toward a broader understanding of the present. Here, narration becomes meditation, and meditation becomes a way of inhabiting the world with fullness and reverence. May these pages act as parables for consciousness and as echoes of a voice that accompanies bards from the origin of times.

Leyla Margarita Tobías Buelvas Sincelejo,
January 2026

Author's Warning

The historian asked me why I wanted to decipher history if it had already been written. I answered him with a fable that God gave me in a dream.

> *Once upon a time, in the Golden Age—the one the Bible calls Paradise—a human being was tempted by Darkness. She had been banished for millennia by his ancestors after the fall of the angels of Mount Hermon, and, trembling from the clouds, she pleaded: "Let me in. I, too, am in need." The human thought the ancients had treated her unjustly and that nothing would change if he let her pass; he even believed he might learn new things. And he opened the door. And Darkness entered, and since then no one sees.*

I transcribe these texts so that those who wish may see—not with their eyes, but with the spirit—and recover their primordial light, before good and evil.
It should be noted for historians and social researchers who aspire to the impartiality of the mathematician that these texts are born of intuitions, of a symbolic reading of history, in which the events and figures evoked here form annals that do not always coincide with chronology or with the documentary record.

The Creator, Evolutionist

It is commonplace among chronicists of our time to oppose science and religion as if one were a lamp of certainty and the other a mere shadow of credulity. Such opposition, repeated without examination, forgets that both arise from the same ancient longing: to give intelligible form to the world. One does so through numbers, proportions, and laws; the other through signs, narratives, and figures that speak to the understanding by way of symbol.

Already Saint Augustine warned that the Scriptures were not given to teach the courses of the stars nor the framework of the elements, but to lead the soul from the visible toward the eternal. In *De Genesi ad litteram* he maintained that the sacred letter contains multiple senses, accommodated to the capacity of each reader, and that divine truth is not exhausted on the surface of the narrative, but unfolds as the spirit that contemplates it matures.

Science, for its part, aspires to an exactitude that dispenses with the moral and the invisible, by virtue of its method and its claim to universality. Its domain is the measurable; that of religion, the meaningful. Both, however, pursue knowledge, though along different paths and with distinct instruments.

After examining the destiny of civilizations, Oswald Spengler prescribed that great religious institutions functioned less as guardians of immutable dogmas than as cultural matrices—spaces where arts, sciences, and forms of thought germinated that, in time, overflowed and surpassed them. So it was in Renaissance Europe, where the creative impulse flourished precisely within structures intended to endure.

The origin of this writing is set in the summer of 2005, in Istanbul. After reading an extensive history of Byzantium and the Turkish Empire, I wished to feel the weight of that past not in museums, but in the living, weathered stone. I devoted an entire day to walking along the Theodosian walls, following their fragmented course, venturing with my wife into neighborhoods marked by palpable uprootedness, where fallen grandeur mingled with present poverty. The air smelled of hot dust, of wild herbs sprouting between the ashlars, and of a salty distance carried from the Golden Horn.

It was in one of those half-abandoned stretches, where the wall breaks open and reveals inner courtyards overrun by rubble, that the discovery occurred. A group of children was playing with stones beside a mound of earth. When they saw us approaching, they stopped their game and watched us with a tension-laden nervousness. Their gazes darted from us to the corners of the neighboring alleys, as if awaiting or fearing a nearby presence. One of them, the oldest, held something in his dirty hands: a rough package wrapped in an oily rag. Without a word, with a quick and furtive gesture, he held it out to me. The act had the form of a handover, an attempt to rid themselves of an object that, I sensed, felt uncomfortable or dangerous to them.

As I examined the bundle, a sharp noise startled us. A worker high on the wall's face, almost at the very edge of the precipice of centuries, lost his balance for an instant. His figure swayed against the sky, a silhouette cut out against the abyss. He watched us with an intensity full of meaning. For a moment everything hung suspended: the children motionless, the worker upright like a wavering sentinel, the cloth parcel in my hands. I handed over some crumpled bills and took the package. The children melted into the ruins before we could speak a word.

Back at the hotel, I unfolded the rag. Inside lay a manuscript of cured skin, extraordinarily dry and surprisingly intact, its pages covered in compact, angular script I could not identify at the time. It carried the unmistakable weight of genuine antiquity.

Years later, in London, a paleographer at the British Museum confirmed its exceptional nature: the script belonged to a variant of Babylonian Akkadian used by learned scribes during the Hebrew exile. The translation, arduous and prolonged, was only completed recently. What follows is its faithful rendition.

Its author, as could be deduced, was an exiled Hebrew, versed in his people's oral traditions, who deliberately chose the language of the empire that held him captive to record his vision. Most remarkable is his claim: he asserts that he received these revelations before the Genesis narrative was fixed in writing, when creation survived only as a tale passed by the fire. At the heart of his disquiet rose a persistent question, an unease that consumed him: how can He who lacks limit rest?

> *I, Ezra ben Yehudá, son of captives, write these words on a clay tablet in the land of Shin'ar, beside the waters of the Purattu, the great river the Babylonians call Euphrates. I write in the tongue of my captors so these words will not circulate among my own.*
>
> *Until now, creation was told by the fire: seven days, seven words of the Eternal, and all was. From childhood one point of that tale troubled me: the rest. How can He who has no limit rest?*
>
> *For seven consecutive moons the Eternal, who has no name, manifested Himself to me in dreams. They were diaphanous images, of colors never seen: persistent visions, etched with clarity in memory.*

I saw the beginning. I saw something rise where nothing was: thought or feeling in an act without day or night, a vision that fled in the instant yet stretched eternally; that is, a life in process, vast, sustained, hard to grasp in waking. I lived hundreds of years, periods so immense that the kingdoms of men seemed insignificant, in societies not of men but of stars and sounds, impulses of feeling, until at last I discerned the portentous voice of the Creator and saw the earth emerge from nothing, burn for ages like a torch, until it became a convex plain that cooled, divided, transformed into a breathing land. I saw for thousands of years the desolate sea evaporate, then aquatic creatures appear and vanish. I saw their remains buried beneath layers of time, and afterward, the earth engendered.

I understood then that creation had not occurred in days, but in billions of years. And that the patience with which the Eternal shaped His work was choice and lesson in humility, which we were to emulate.

In the last of the visions I also saw the meaning of rest. The Eternal led me to an ancient tablet, older even than Babylon, inscribed with the poem of Gilgamesh. There it was said that nothing endures, that only the gods live forever under the sun, and that for men all is wind until they reach their eternal rest:

"There is no permanence. Do we build a house to last forever? Do we seal a contract to endure forever? Do brothers divide an inheritance to last forever? […] From ancient days there is no permanence. The sleeper and the dead, how alike they are! […] Only the gods live forever under the sun. As for mankind, their days are numbered; whatever they do, all is wind."

I knew then that rest is born of weariness until it becomes its end; that every work needs a limit lest it dissolve; that death itself is a form of closure, the rest that crowns labor.

The final age, reflected in our seventh day, elucidates divine peace: a fullness that requires cessation and eternal contemplation.

Upon awakening from dreams that shrank my life to a grain of sand in the desert, I tried to communicate it. I spoke to the elders, the merchants, the peasants. I was not understood. They said a God who creates slowly is not omnipotent. I answered that patience does not diminish power, but perfects it.

I prescribe in this papyrus that the truth must be veiled. I translated eternities into what could be received: seven days, each with a morning and an evening. But I left signs of their correspondence with thousands of lustra. The progression remained intact: from the formless to the ordered, from the inert to the living, from matter to consciousness.

I wrote "day" knowing it was "eternity." I added no explanations. I trusted that others would read when they were ready.

This I leave written for those who will come after, when time is no longer narrow. Then they will know the days were ages, and that the patience of the Creator is the model for human patience.

For if He did not hasten to create the world—since He dwells in the infinite and delights in multiplying it into multiple infinities, just as life projects itself in limitless thoughts—neither should we hasten to live it. And if He chose rest as contemplation of His work, we too shall rest when ours concludes and we can behold it indefinitely: with joy if it was tested, with torment if it was sinister.

I bear witness to this in the fourteenth year of the captivity, beneath the shadow of the ziggurat.

Ezra ben Yehudá In the fourteenth year of the captivity

The God who shines through the first folds of Genesis is no hasty craftsman nor wonder-worker of sudden gestures, but a patient intelligence that takes pleasure in the gradual unfolding of the created. So the ancient doctors already intuited when Gregory of Nyssa taught that the divine work is revealed by degrees, as a pedagogy directed to the limited creature, and not as a lightning bolt meant to dazzle without instruction. For these Fathers, the world does not burst forth finished, but arrives, grows, and orders itself according to a rhythm belonging more to eternity than to human time.

This reading was not foreign to visionary spirits who, centuries later, beheld creation as a living process. Jakob Böhme spoke of the birth of God in things, of a divinity that expresses itself through tensions, maturations, and rests; Anne Catherine Emmerick, in her visions, described the formation of the world as a succession of vast scenes impossible to reduce to the count of earthly days. In both, creation appears as a prolonged drama, not as an instantaneous act.

Almost our contemporary, Teilhard de Chardin recognized in matter a spiritual vocation, a slow ascent from the formless to consciousness, from dispersed energy to meaning. His language, even clothed in modern science, does not depart from the ancient presentiment: that the universe was not hurled into being all at once, but accompanied, sustained, and guided through innumerable ages.

Hence the literal interpretation of the "days" as brief units proves insufficient for whoever attends to the spirit of the text. The days of Genesis reveal themselves as stations of a prolonged work, as symbolic ages in which creation is tried, corrected, and perfected. The narrative does not aim to fix a calendar but to offer an intelligible architecture of

becoming: an order of emergence that passes from the indistinct to the articulated, from the elemental to the living, from the living to the conscious.

Thus, before any scientific exegesis or modern controversy, the sacred text itself proposes an inner chronology, a narration of the growth of being. Such is the sequence that unfolds in the first verses of Genesis, as—according to tradition—they were received by the Babylonian scribe in vision and rendered into the language his people could bear.

1) Evolution from energy to matter Contemporary science, heir to ancient cosmological disputes, still strives to explain the origin of the universe from a primordial explosion, a sudden expansion of condensed energy that would have given rise to all material form. This conjecture—known as the Big Bang—describes a violent beginning, yet leaves in shadow the transition from energy to stable matter and the primal mystery of being. Such a threshold of knowledge is understandable if we recall that, already in antiquity, philosophers understood the ultimate principle as an ἀρχή that precedes all measurement.

The Genesis, far from offering a mechanical explanation, proposes an inaugural image of dense symbolic charge: an unformed, fluid, indistinct earth suspended in darkness, over which hovers the divine breath. It is a soft matrix, comparable to the prima materia of the alchemists or the Ungrund of which Jakob Böhme spoke: a formless ground containing all forms in potency.

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

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Here matter appears under the sign of the liquid and the chaotic, as the secret design of the Creator, the same that chaos mathematics now begins to decipher through complex equations exceeding simple arithmetic: its original condition. The Spirit acts by separating and assuming nothingness with its presence; it moves as author of a gestation, an essence called to unfold in cosmic birth.

Gregory of Nyssa read in this movement a divine pedagogy: order arises through maturation, according to an economy of time.

Centuries later, Jakob Böhme would speak of a fertile abyss from which all determinations spring; and from

a twentieth-century evolutionary mysticism one would recognize in that initial energy an inner tension toward form, life, and consciousness, as though the entire universe breathed from its origin a vocation to fullness.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Modern physics describes the appearance of light as the visible manifestation of an energy that attains order, rhythm, and measure. Clarity precedes finished form, just as intuition precedes discursive thought.

The Mosaic text places light as the first act of conscious differentiation, an inaugural word that separates, distinguishes, and orients. Before any celestial architecture, light bursts forth as a principle of intelligibility, a sign that primordial chaos begins to become legible.

This clarity still lacks astral support; it springs as primal epiphany. Augustine of Hippo understood this initial light as *lux intellectualis*, irradiation of the Word that disposes creation to receive form. In this sense, light precedes the sun just as meaning precedes the sign.

The mystical tradition recognizes in this instant an awakening of the cosmos: matter begins to recognize itself under a harmonic law. In a spiritual reading of evolution, this moment appears as a threshold of growing complexity, where energy orients itself toward coherent structures, inaugurating an ascent that will culminate in reflective consciousness.

Scripture prolongs this differentiation by describing the disposition of the waters and the celestial expanse, an image of progressive architecture in which every element finds its place according to an inner rhythm.

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. 7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

Here the universe acquires breath. The expanse creates space for becoming. Gregory Thaumaturgus saw in this separation a liturgical gesture: the world begins to order itself as temple.

Light thus acts as mediator between primal energy and living form. It illuminates, summons, disposes. Under its influence, matter abandons indistinction and sets out toward a history that will culminate in gaze, word, and memory.

11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

The sciences of nature describe the emergence of life as the result of a long convergence of favorable conditions: moisture, heat, minerals, and time. In such convergence, the earth ceases to be a mere receptacle and assumes a generative function.

The biblical narrative places this vital awakening in the very entrails of the earth. Vegetal life rises as an upward, rooted, silent impulse, prior to all animal mobility.

The earth appears as an active matrix, endowed with inner potency that responds to the creative command. In the exegesis of Gregory of Nyssa, this fecundity symbolizes the soul which, receiving the word, bears fruit according to its nature. The seed already encloses the future.

Plants live by a sober and constant economy. They absorb, transform, return. Their extended temporality flows

according to the deep rhythms of the cosmos. Maeterlinck recognized in them a discreet wisdom, a precise orientation toward light and equilibrium.

The biblical text likewise resolves an ancient enigma by showing seed and fruit as simultaneous realities, intertwined in one and the same creative act.

12 And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

Here a law of continuity is consecrated: each living form begets according to its kind. In the key of progressive interiority, this moment marks the beginning of organized complexity that prepares more mobile and sensitive forms.

Vegetation thus clothes the earth in a first vital language.

16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. 17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, 18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.

20 And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. 21 And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

After the vegetal adornment, the aquatic realm receives a different fecundity. Water, which at the beginning figured as indistinct matrix, now assumes explicit generative power. Its constant mobility, changing depth, and ceaseless

murmur make it a propitious space for a life that undulates, moves, and tries directions.

Genesis attributes to the waters an immediate creative capacity. From them spring animated creatures, endowed with vital impulse and diversity of forms. The sacred verb describes an exuberant proliferation, a teeming of souls that people seas and skies according to an inner rhythm.

The text gathers reptiles, fish, and birds in one and the same creative gesture, as though the passage between water, earth, and air obeyed a deep continuity. Creeping, swimming, and flying appear as degrees of one same vital aspiration: to abandon stillness, explore space, enlarge being.

Gregory of Nyssa understood this diversity as expression of a divine abundance that delights in the multiplication of forms. Each creature embodies a singular mode of participating in life, a proper rhythm inscribed in the great compass of the cosmos.

Modern paleontological discoveries, by revealing intermediate creatures covered in primitive feathers or endowed with ambiguous limbs, prolong this ancient intuition: creation deploys forms of transition, liminal figures that link regions of being. Swedenborg described this multiplicity as the source of spiritual pleasure, variety that sustains the harmony of the whole and makes possible the fullness of celestial joy.

Water, element of metamorphosis, favors this expansion. There life learns to orient itself, to respond to stimuli, to multiply with exuberance. The great whales, evoked by the sacred text, symbolize a culmination of force and concord, vast forms that plow the abyss with almost liturgical majesty.

Birds inaugurate verticality. The upward impulse separates them from the terrestrial surface and inscribes

them in the domain of air, intermediate region between matter and light. The ancient Egyptians and Hildegard of Bingen saw in their flight an image of the soul elevated by the divine breath, participating in the celestial order without abandoning creation.

Thus the fifth day unfolds a choreography of movements: swimming, creeping, flying. The world is populated with trajectories, migrations, songs. Life abandons vegetal silence and acquires voice, pulse, and direction.

24 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. 25 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

With the fifth day the expansion of mobile life culminates; with the sixth, the earth itself assumes direct generative function. The soil, which before offered support and nourishment, now becomes a womb producing creatures endowed with warmth, closeness, and bond. Terrestrial life acquires density, contact, and measured breathing.

Genesis attributes this new fecundity to the earth itself, as though the dust, long worked by waters and fires, had reached sufficient maturity to engender more complex forms. Matter gathers, concentrates, becomes sensitive flesh.

The text here distinguishes a precise ordering: domestic animals, wild beasts, and creeping things. Each group responds to a different mode of inhabiting closeness with future man. A gradation of docility, strength, and cunning appears, as though creation were trying diverse forms of relationship.

Basil the Great spoke of an earth animated by the word that fecundates from within. Gregory Nazianzen celebrated in these beings a fuller participation in the warmth of life. The body acquires centrality: shelter of the heart, memory of origin, promise of communion.

From a natural reading, this transition manifests as the emergence of mammals endowed with parental care, prolonged learning, and refined sensibility. Life begins to fold upon itself, to feel, to remember, to anticipate. The world disposes itself for consciousness.

The earth, common mother according to ancient proverbs, now offers creatures capable of affection and recognition. The dust has become warm. Matter has learned to embrace.

26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

With the sixth day, creation reaches a singular threshold: the earth, already accustomed to engendering sensitive life, receives a breath that elevates it to reflective consciousness. The clay, worked through ages, now disposes itself to receive a form capable of naming, remembering, and guarding. Matter, at last, recognizes itself.

The plural of the verb—"Let us make"—resounded in tradition as echo of eternal counsel. Gregory of Nyssa understood in it the summons of Wisdom, a loving deliberation in which creation becomes dialogue. The

human being emerges as εἰκών, living image called to ὁμοίωσις, likeness attained through maturation.

The divine image manifests in the capacity for relationship, in the aptitude for care, and in the vocation of government understood as service. The dominion here indicated acquires pastoral meaning: to guard, to order, to cultivate. Man appears as mediator between earth and heaven.

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. 29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

The common food establishes a primordial alliance. Life organizes itself around an economy of gift and limit. Hildegard of Bingen celebrated this harmony as *viriditas*, green force that traverses bodies and souls.

From a spiritual reading of evolution, this moment signals the emergence of symbolic consciousness, of language and rite. The earth, by engendering man, learns to think itself. The clay becomes word; the word, promise.

2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. 3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

The seventh day, recorded on the tablet found beside the waters of the Purattu, constitutes the interpretive key of the entire creative sequence. The scribe understands that divine rest expresses a law higher than mere doing: the law of consummation.

Rest manifests as sovereign act. God gathers His creation into Himself, contemplates it, and blesses it with permanence. Time folds back upon its meaning and becomes dwelling. Origen, in his Homilies on Genesis, understood this rest as pedagogy of the soul: God leads creation by degrees so that the spirit may learn to inhabit fullness with measure. Order is attained through maturation, and perfection is consummated in the perseverance of good.

The Babylonian scribe understood this law with singular clarity. In his testimony, divine patience reveals itself as the supreme form of power: a potency that unfolds with continuity, that perfects by succession, and that crowns the work with stillness. Duration becomes instrument of meaning. Creation, extended through ages, instructs men in the art of persevering.

In the final tablet, the scribe links the seventh day to the ancient wisdom recorded in the poem of Gilgamesh: every labor finds its term in rest, and existence attains its truth when the work is closed. Rest emerges as fulfillment, as the ultimate seal of effort. Death itself is inscribed in this logic: closure of the task, passage toward contemplation.

Genesis thus reveals itself in its ethical teaching alongside its cosmogonic vision. Divine patience is proposed as model for human life. The architect of the cosmos builds with measure, orders with fidelity, matures form before consecrating it. Man, His image, participates in this vocation: to work with loyalty, to persevere in good, to await fullness.

On Original Sin

Adam asked the serpent, "What is original sin?" and the serpent replied: "The pleasure of deception, a transgression in which, out of fear that others may act in the same way, the lie thrives. The greater the deception, the greater the pleasure and the fear, seed of grievances, thefts, murders, and curses."

Adam, distracted by Eve's nakedness, did not listen to her.

The Superiority of Neanderthal Man

I

"One of the mysteries of archaeology, if not its very reason for being, is the explanation of the extinction of Neanderthal man, who inhabited the foothills of the mountains of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East some one hundred and fifty thousand years ago. Possessor of a cranial mass greater than that of Homo sapiens, and capable of manufacturing his own tools, the last Neanderthal man was impaled some thirty thousand years ago, that is, during the apogee of our species. The most eminent archaeologists suggest his annihilation at the hands of our bloodthirsty ancestors, a hypothesis that any of the atrocities being committed at this very moment by some adolescent soldier would corroborate. We might likewise infer a mass extermination akin to that carried out by twentieth-century Europeans against their more prosperous fellow beings with black hair and dark pupils. Several sacred texts support this hypothesis: in the Book of Genesis, Cain kills Abel not only out of jealousy, but chiefly because Abel prospers as a hunter over his impoverished brother the farmer; in Ovid's Metamorphoses the peace of the most primitive times is shattered by the appearance of iron:

> … de duro est ultima ferro.
> protinus inrupit venae peioris in aevum
> omne nefas: fugere pudor verumque fidesque
>
> […the last age is that of heavy iron,
> with which the worst perversity emerges:
> modesty, truth, and faith flee away.]

What few anthropologists or etymologists would dare to consider is the superiority of Neanderthal man over Homo sapiens. One of the factors that most irritates the devotees of Darwin is the surplus of cranial mass in Neanderthal man. In their eagerness to control our consciousness, our scientists stubbornly insist on confining our being to our brains and determining our intelligence according to our DNA. If this were true, such a premise would indeed confirm the superiority of Neanderthal man. Our Darwinists, however, unscrupulously clarify that the cranial mass of Neanderthal man is not indicative of his intelligence, but rather of his clumsiness, amply demonstrated by the very fact that this species has already been annihilated…"

Carvalho, Emanuel, Compendium of Scientific Stubbornness (Coimbra, 2002), p. 234.

II

"For seventy thousand years Homo sapiens and Neanderthal man coexisted on Earth in harmony; both formed social groups around common beliefs and rites. Often both groups disputed a territory, generally near a river, disputes that were peacefully resolved according to the laws common to all the creatures of the universe (…)

Homo sapiens discovered agriculture in dreams and, with it, the advantages of sedentary life. At first, Homo sapiens scorned the nomadic life of his closest relative, until hunger, brought about by crops ruined by hailstorms or droughts, forced him to return to his former occupation. From then on it was not unusual to see young Homo sapiens taking employment as apprentices to Neanderthal men (…)

One day Ka-Nin, son of Ad-Kan, conceived the extraordinary idea of murdering his master in order to seize his routes and fence off his forests; the consummation of his reckless act was swiftly imitated by several of his peers (…)

Alarmed by the destructive fury of their apprentices, the Neanderthal men summoned their poets, who weighed the advantages and disadvantages of murder or, as they then called it, unnecessary death. After long hours of fasting and meditation, the bards unanimously concluded that immolation was preferable to life in a universe besieged by the fear of killing or being killed. Their metaphysical certainties of a happy eternity that would begin with their death persuaded Neanderthal men and women to perish without resistance at the hands of their bellicose subordinates (…)

Three moons after the last Neanderthal man had been sacrificed, Ka-Nin turned his weapons against his own kind; first against those who had already shown some resistance to his actions, and later against his own relatives. Everyone feared, and with good reason, being murdered in the middle of the night. Since then Homo sapiens has atoned for his insolence, surviving in the fear of killing or being killed…"

Angelus Mzhelsky, Anatomy of Fear (Bishkek, 2002), §§567–678.

The Tower of Babel or of absolute ideologies

There is an affinity between absolute ideologies such as the Inquisition, Nazism, Communism, and the Socialism of the twenty-first century, and those who built the Tower of Babel. Contemplating the wisdom of the Creator, reflected in nature, the mother of all inventions, the sages of Babel persuaded themselves that they could surpass the god Mazda by erecting the tallest building in the universe, which they would call the Tower. I quote the first verses of chapter eleven of Genesis, translated by Reina-Valera:

> 1 *Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.*
> 2 *And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they settled there.*
> 3 *And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and asphalt for mortar.*
> 4 *And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth."*
> 5 *And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men were building.*

Mazda was the god who, at that time, most closely resembled Jehovah. *The Thousand and One Nights* reduce all theological discussion to problems of semantics; I refer to the unpublished tale in which a Jew explains to an intolerant Sheikh that God created religions as carved doors, each

beautifully unique within His dwelling, which unfortunately some of His children take as the only indispensable entrance.

It mattered little that the construction of the Tower demanded the enslavement of many peoples and the servitude of all other social groups; the dream of surpassing Mazda and becoming God justified everything. The first architects laid the foundations of that tower as wide as the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and humanity spread across thousands of kilometers.

> 6 *And the Lord said, "Behold, the people are one, and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; and now nothing will restrain them from what they have imagined to do."*
> 7 *"Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."*

In the end, by divine will, the people, isolated for centuries of construction in scattered outskirts, developed their own languages. The demands of survival became their priority, and the Tower was gradually abandoned, without any priest or warrior taking interest in finishing it.

> 8 *Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.*

Man always submits to the perfect ideal prescribed by divinity, never to the genius of a man enslaved by his own pettiness, needs, and absurdities.

> 9 *Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of all the earth.*

On the Actors since the Fall and Ruin of Atlantis

Unlike the divine Plato, the Dravidian historians attach less importance to the technological advances of the Atlanteans than to their histrionic gifts, which were developed by the guru Jasyare. His theory consisted in preparing for life as an actor prepares for the stage. Thus, the soldier had to study all the books of warfare; the physician, all the treatises on homeopathy and medicine; the engineer, all the compendia on resistance and design.

The world would be their stage, and both the proper use of the voice and the mastery of emotions became the priority of that civilization. Care for physical appearance became equally important, so the Atasanti devoted half of each early dawn to exercises of endurance and flexibility. Within a generation, their beauty, their precise manners, and their correct pronunciation persuaded the other nations of the world of the ascendancy of the Atasanti, who, besides being industrious, were valiant and persevering.

Their philosophers, poets, and statesmen shone, as did their architects, sculptors, and sailors, for they fervently believed that their lives were nothing but the performance of a role that had to shine before the millions of spectators made up of all beings that had existed and would ever exist. Like any accomplished actor, Jasyare taught them that death was nothing more than the final act of a singular performance, to be followed by new representations on new stages. Their greatest spectator was God, Jasyare assured them, who encompassed all beings, from the tiniest insect to the most magnificent sperm whale. Jasyare taught, in turn, under the influence of Dravidian pantheism, according to

which there is only one Being that experiences its creation through all possible existences. In order to make its experience unique, the Being continually plunges into the well of forgetfulness, from which it emerges, like a newborn, in new creatures. Life, according to Jasyare, is the interaction of the Being with itself.

Just as a versatile actor can portray as many as thirty characters on stage, combining a deep voice with a high one, or one physical defect with another, so the Being combines a queen with a beggar, or a hare with a hummingbird. The superiority of the Atasanti over the other nations allowed them to build bridges, avenues, warships, and great industries, which grew thanks to the hiring of their neighbors, the Tamara, whose civilization still lived by hunting and gathering. Over the years, the prestige of Jasyare's disciples increased; their economy was backed by loans, bonds, and paper money that they issued under the credit of their civilization. They developed warships and built citadels of crystal and mother-of-pearl. Perfection then came to be the exclusive domain of the histrions.

Centuries passed, until a new generation of Atasanti arose, led by Proset, an actor with bulging eyes and a diminutive body. His ugliness led him to refute the teachings of Jasyare and instead propose what came to be called the Sociology of the Beehive, in which there existed two kinds of citizens: the workers, who enjoyed labor, and the drones, who had been born for leisure. According to Proset, the product of society had to be distributed equally between the two social conglomerates.

Proset rose to power with his promises and immediately opened the treasuries and the credit of the Atasanti to their citizens, who squandered them in an orgy of luxury and excess. Far from respecting the hierarchies of the hive, the Atasanti murdered their most outstanding

actors. For nearly three hundred years the foreign nations witnessed the decadence of the Atasanti, who wore away the respect their ancestors had earned, which eventually translated into the loss of credit. The economy of the Atasanti collapsed under the demands of their external creditors. The coup de grâce was delivered by the Tamara poet Abigail, who ironized their pretensions in a sestet:

I shall forge daggers and you will pay for them
I shall fashion weapons and you will pay for them
I shall build citadels and you will pay for them
For we are of a superior lineage
For we dared to dominate
As no inferior would ever dare to dominate

Abigail awakened the rest of humanity from its lethargy, and the inhabitants of the other continents took to the streets in protest, forcing their leaders to break economic and diplomatic ties with the Atasanti. In retaliation, Proset deported foreigners and new citizens of Atlantis up to the third generation.

Nearly sixty million immigrants were received by the continents of their ancestors; these were the years of the "Red Arrogance," so called because of the color that predominated in the mountains of the Atasanti. But after three years of isolation, Proset's policies proved counterproductive, and one day the Atasanti awoke to the bitter news that their currency had collapsed with the flight of foreign capital, and that their war machines, lacking the labor that had forged them, were wrecked on their very first military expedition. Unemployment and hunger drove the Atlanteans to global beggary. The rest of the world, however, closed its doors to them. Their citizens then fell into the bitterest recriminations, until Proset was

assassinated, giving way to a civil war that in only two years led the nation into total conflagration.

The remains of that great nation were swept away by the sea, the chronicle continues, proof of divine wrath, and will be discovered in the age of the dolphins in what is now called the Bermuda Triangle. It is explained, however, that after the destruction of the Atlanteans, the Egyptians and the Davidic peoples created a gigantic sarcophagus of sand in order to contain the radiation of those wastes for millions of years.

The historian Rad-Cassan argues, for his part, that the sarcophagus was built by the other nations of that generation, and that the principal purpose of the sandy bed was punitive: to hide from later generations the ruins, the excesses, and the ignominious arrogance, fall, and ruin of the Atlanteans. In another passage of his extensive work, Rad-Cassan argues, in my view erroneously, that the distrust of most of the world toward actors derives precisely from the tragic end of the Atasanti.

Forgiveness, the Legacy of Israel

In ancient times, in the lands of Canaan, there lived a woman named Rebekah in a modest dwelling. She was known for her beauty and her kind heart, but also for being the mother of twin sons, Jacob and Esau.

Her husband, the blind patriarch Isaac, favored Esau, a strong young man with tangled hair and an untamed spirit. Esau was a skilled hunter and warrior who, for thirty years, had conquered lands so vast that it would take two days on horseback to cross them from end to end. Isaac barely noticed Jacob, the younger son. Jacob was a slender, beardless youth whose only ambition was to care for his father's land and worship God through his songs and sacred dances.

As the firstborn, Esau was destined to receive the paternal blessing and inheritance. For this reason, Rebekah, as mothers often do, felt a deep affection for her more vulnerable son.

One day, Isaac decided to grant the paternal blessing to Esau, an act of profound significance in his time. Surprised by the news, Esau set out alone on his journey back to his land.

In those days, the world was sparsely populated, and it was rare to encounter other travelers on the roads. After three days of travel, the sky filled with storm clouds, and a thunderclap frightened Esau's camels and donkeys, which fled and left him alone. A relentless rain flooded the fields, forming streams that became rivers, forcing Esau to flee to a mountain and take refuge in a cave for several days, where he barely survived on insects and worms.

At last, when the storm ceased and the waters receded, Esau, exhausted, resumed his journey. After several

days of solitary walking, he arrived at his brother's cabin, which lay half a day's ride from their parents' house.

Jacob was preparing a stew of lentils with lamb when Esau arrived. The firstborn, scarcely recognizable because of his emaciated appearance, humbly asked him for a little of that comforting food.

"I have only one portion," Jacob replied, "but I will give it to you if you are willing to make a trade: give me the paternal blessing you received in exchange."

Esau, astonished by the request, protested, "Are you trying to steal my inheritance? I have gained lands all these years, while you only care for our father's fields."

Esau paused to reflect and finally agreed to the exchange. "Very well," he said, "if I die of hunger, I will never enjoy that inheritance anyway. I will give you the blessing, but you must also obtain our father's blessing."

Jacob nodded solemnly.

Esau shared the meal in silence, and Jacob offered him his bed so that he might rest.

The next day, both brothers returned to their parents' house. Jacob told his mother Rebekah what had happened. When Isaac, the blind patriarch, awoke from his deep sleep, he asked Esau to hunt a deer as an offering to God.

"That is what you must do to receive the paternal blessing," he told him.

Esau, forgetting the agreement he had made with Jacob, hurried off to the hunt. But Rebekah, upon learning her husband's intentions, went to Jacob.

"The will of God is clear," she said to her son. "I know your father will never grant you the paternal blessing. You must act quickly."

Jacob followed his mother's advice. He dressed in his brother Esau's clothes and covered his body with the

skin of a young goat to appear as hairy as his brother. When he presented himself before his father, he said, "I am Esau, your firstborn."

Isaac, blinded by age and lack of sight, trusted his sense of touch and granted the blessing to Jacob, believing him to be Esau.

Thus Jacob acquired his brother's inheritance and deceived his father in order to obtain the blessing of the firstborn. But the consequences of his actions soon followed. When Esau learned of the deception, he was filled with rage and cried out to heaven for justice.

Warned by his mother Rebekah, Jacob fled from home. The years passed, and Jacob, blessed by God, prospered and had twelve sons with different women. His most beloved son, Joseph, shared his taste for music and dance.

One day, Esau returned to the region where Jacob lived. Fearing his brother's wrath, Jacob prepared to face his destiny. He sent gifts as an offering to Esau, hoping that his brother would forgive him.

But Esau, touched by divine grace and maturity, instead of taking revenge, embraced his brother, thus restoring peace to the descendants of Abraham.

God, however, had prepared a lesson for Jacob. Ten of Jacob's sons, filled with jealousy of Joseph and driven by the same envy Jacob had once felt toward Esau, sold Joseph as a slave to passing merchants, deceiving their father with a tunic stained with lamb's blood.

"A wild beast has devoured him," they lied to Jacob.

The news of Joseph's supposed death plunged his father into sorrow and despair.

Joseph's destiny led him to distant lands and to a life of slavery in Egypt. However, Joseph's love for study drew him closer to God, and his love for Him allowed him to trust

his intuition. Intuition, a divine and immediate perception, represented, through imagination, the presence of the Creator in every being.

Joseph became an exceptional interpreter of dreams. This attracted the attention of the Pharaoh of Egypt, who, tormented by nightmares, sought his help to decipher a disturbing dream in which he saw seven lean cows devouring seven fat cows.

Guided by divine wisdom, Joseph explained that the lean cows represented seven years of drought and famine that would follow seven years of abundance and prosperity. He advised Pharaoh to store grain during the years of plenty in order to face the future scarcity.

Grateful, Pharaoh appointed Joseph governor of Egypt. Thus, the young slave became a man of great power.

Nine years later, Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt in search of grain. Joseph, still hidden behind the veil of his new role, decided to forgive them and received them. After a brief imprisonment that led his father Jacob and his uncle Esau to travel from Canaan, Joseph finally revealed his true identity.

"I am Joseph, the one against whom you conspired and whom you sold as a slave," he declared. His brothers fell at his feet, and Joseph, like Esau before him, embraced them, all of them shedding tears of reconciliation.

One of the brothers asked, "Why do you not take revenge on us?"

Joseph answered with wisdom, "Because if we do not forgive those whom we love the most, how will we ever be able to love ourselves?"

On the Origin of the Amazons

Quotation from the lost work of Herodotus on the Amazons, found in a footnote of a sixteenth-century printed edition of Strabo's Geography, available on the fourth floor of the library of the University of Pennsylvania.

The reference to Greek dramaturgy was added in blue ink by a pious amanuensis:

Amazonia to the north extended as far as the lands near the Ural Mountains, reaching the forests of Eastern Europe. To the west, its territory stretched to the region of the Carpathians, encompassing the courses of several rivers such as the Danube. To the east it extended toward the Dnieper and Dvina rivers, near the forests and mountainous regions. To the south it reached the Balkans and the Dinaric Alps, mountain ranges that run across the Balkan Peninsula.

According to the prophetesses of Apollo, ancient priestesses of the White Goddess, one of their women, centuries before the arrival of Jason, challenged Zil, a warrior who had violated her, to fight in the arena with reckless courage before the inhabitants of Amazonia.

In a fit of rage and violence, inflamed by humiliation, Zil responded with a brutal act: he struck her and, with extreme cruelty, thrust a bronze shield into her womb, tearing her entrails. This grotesque lesson left an indelible mark on the hearts and souls of the warriors and priestesses of Amazonia.

News of such an atrocity against those who gave birth to the Amazons spread like fire through a dry forest. The Amazons, outraged and thirsting for vengeance, felt themselves possessed by the offended goddesses. It was an event that in Athens would inspire the playwright Euripides

to compose his trilogy The Bacchae (Βάκχαι), although the Moon Goddess was there replaced by her modern equivalent, Dionysus.

Divine fury flooded the streets and the souls of the Amazons, who tore apart their fragile bonds of kinship, rising against their own fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. Blood was spilled, and chaos seized the city.

After the unprecedented slaughter, the victors preserved barely a hundred children, destined to ensure the continuity of their warrior lineage. On the condition that they would be sacrificed to the White Goddess, each child was granted the privilege of being king for one year, during which he served as the sole consort of four hundred virgins.

The secret of fertility was guarded even more jealously by the priestesses, who educated the children in the certainty that it was Aeolus, god of the wind, who impregnated the virgins when they exposed their genitals to the open air during the rituals of the changing moon.

Thus, copulation and extreme violence sealed the fate of that region governed by indomitable warrior women.

Centuries later, hordes of Aryans revealed the secret of insemination. Inflamed by their procreative power, the Amazon princes defeated and subdued the Amazons, whom they auctioned as slaves. All reference to Amazonia was destroyed, and new generations began to call themselves Slavs.

Since then, buyers of servants frequented those lands; it was they who coined the name "slaves" for the descendants of the now mythical Amazons, in virtue of their captivating beauty.

Moses, Destroyer of the Bronze Age

The twilight of the Bronze Age outlines the chaos that brought about the collapse of the civilizations and communities of the Eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia, the Levant, the Aegean, and the Kingdom of Tartessos in the Iberian Peninsula during the second millennium BCE, approximately between 1600 and 1150 BCE. This collapse was marked by the decline, fragmentation, or total destruction of various civilizations, urban centers, and political and economic structures that had endured for long periods of time.

Paleontologists and historians, conditioned by positivism, avoid associating this decline with the collapse of the Egyptian Empire, the wealthiest of those that flourished at the height of the Bronze Age, surpassing the Assyrian, the Cretan, the Hittite, and the Mycenaean.

Yet the dates of this decline coincide with the events recorded in two dissimilar texts: the plagues of Egypt described in Exodus and the calamities compiled in the funerary hymn of the Papyrus of Ipuur, also known as Papyrus Leiden I 344.

The events of the Book of Exodus are generally known, but not those sung by a poet in the Papyrus of Ipuur under the title *The Admonitions of Ipuwer*:

> *The servants and the common people possess slaves,*
> *the scribes have been killed and their books stolen,*
> *Alas for me, in this miserable age*
> *the writings have been destroyed,*
> *and the grain of Egypt belongs to all!*

During the early decades of the twentieth century, Egyptologists attributed these verses to a revolution, until a new generation of translators pointed out allusions to the plagues of Egypt

The river flows, yet blood lies in its bed,
and men drink of it though they thirst.
They shrink from people, humans withdraw,
the thirsty seek waters that may quench them.
(…)
Builders have become cultivators,
bound to the soil, such is their fate.
(…)
Ruin is everywhere!
(…)
Hair has fallen from everyone,
no rank remains, all are alike,
the man of renown and the man without name.

Such descriptions certainly correspond to the plagues that Moses sent, in the name of God, upon a soulless empire that, tormented—as so many of our contemporary governments are—by the control of its own population growth, did not hesitate to order the sacrifice of the children of its Hebrew slaves.

Its cruelty was even greater, for it discriminated against a people that had once saved it from the famine of seven years that devastated the ancient world in 1876 BCE, that is, three hundred years after the prosperous administration of Joseph the Prophet.

The punishment of the universe against such an ungrateful lineage was the chaos described above, in which the builders of the pyramids, once controlled by whips and chains, became the owners of mansions, establishing an

anarchic community without a hierarchical and obedient army to restrain it.

The Bible would narrate, prior to the composition of that papyrus, the destruction of the Egyptian army by the hybris of Pharaoh, Moses' cousin. Despite having suffered the ten plagues, including the death of his firstborn—the only god the Egyptians worshipped besides his father—Pharaoh dared to challenge the God of Moses. He believed that the opening of the Red Sea by suction, as his geometers and mathematicians whispered in his ear, was a natural phenomenon, not a manifestation of the omniscient power of Yahweh, God of men and demigods:

In the desert of the night,
Moses stretched out his hand,
and the sea was split in two,
like a wall of crystal.
The Israelites marched,
secure and without fear,
while the waters parted,
like a curtain of light.
The Egyptians followed,
trusting in their power,
but the Lord confused them,
and their pride collapsed.
The wheels of the chariots
became jammed and were shattered,
and the Egyptians fled,
but it was already too late.
Moses stretched out his hand,
and the waters returned,
drowning the Egyptian army
in a tomb of salt.

The Israelites were free,
thanks to the power of God,
who thus showed the world
eternal love and justice.

Exodus 14:21–29.

What would happen today in America or in the European Union if it were known that all their armed forces had been annihilated?

The chaos described in the Papyrus of Ipuur explains the haste with which its first translators assigned it to a revolution akin to the French or the Bolshevik.

The later fear of the Spartans—that their Helot slaves, who outnumbered them three to one, might rise up and annihilate them—was undoubtedly a consequence of the experience of the collapse of the Egyptian Empire.

Not all the slaves of Egypt were Hebrews, and it is reasonable that, in the face of the triumph of their companions in misfortune, other slaves would have risen up for their freedom.

We know that the Great Pyramid of Khufu, also known as the Pyramid of Giza, had been built a thousand years earlier, during the reign of Pharaoh Khufu in the 26th century BCE, with nearly 100,000 slaves. One fact that corroborates the end of large-scale slavery is that the Egyptians never again undertook the construction of pyramids of such colossal dimensions in the centuries that followed. The Hebrew experience must have frightened later pharaohs, who chose to treat their servitude with greater caution.

The collapse of Egypt, vandalized by its former slaves, meant the end of the great harvests of the Nile:

(…)
Great and small wish to die,
children cry, "I should not have been born."
Princes are hurled against the walls.
(…)
The council chamber has become common ground,
poor men enter the mansions,
the sons of nobles have the streets as their homes.

The trade that sustained the Bronze Age collapsed; the Cretan merchants, responsible for linking Asia with Africa, were assaulted and killed by freed slaves who turned to piracy throughout the Mediterranean. The tin mines of the Tartessians were abandoned, causing hunger and exile; hordes of desperate people founded colonies at a prudent distance from the coasts ravaged by pirate slaves, the primitive ancestors of the Phoenicians who would later found the cities of Cádiz and Carthage.

The most powerful kingdoms of the region, such as the Hittite and the Mycenaean, were overwhelmed by disintegration. The city of Ugarit, for example, had stood out for its cuneiform writing system, a lingua franca of merchants and scribes who, in addition to legal contracts, had compiled literary works and religious texts, as demonstrated by surviving tablet fragments.

Ugaritic literature included epic, mythological, and ritual texts. This city, like so many others once bustling and prosperous, fell into decline; its inhabitants migrated to the high mountains and the valleys were abandoned to the harshness of the sun, turning a fertile land, once associated with paradise, into a barren and desert wasteland at the mercy of bandits.

This period of collapse marked the end of the Silver Age sung by Ovid and the beginning of the darkness that

preceded the Iron Age. The history and literature of these ancient kingdoms were lost to the spear and fire of freed slaves, as a consequence of Egypt's abuses against the people of Yahweh.

The causes of such destruction became *vox populi*, as was reverently expressed by Rahab, a prostitute of Jericho, who preferred to betray her impious compatriots rather than suffer the wrath of the God of Joshua.

Plato's secret slave

δέσποτος γὰρ οὗτος ὁ λόγος, δοῦλον
ὄντα τὸν δοῦλον, ὅτι ἂν ἐπιτάξῃ, πείθεσθαι
For this discourse is a master, and the slave,
being a slave, must obey whatever it commands.

The Laws, 777th

The sun was declining over the city of Athens, bathing its streets and temples in golden light. At the Lyceum, a school founded by the philosopher Plato, students gathered to listen to the teachings of their master.

Plato, at fifty-five years of age, reclined upon cushions set on a rock carved like a couch, at the centre of a space resembling a Greek theatre. Around him rose circular tiers of steps where his companions rested. At his side stood his scribe-slave, Ainous, positioned before an atrium, taking notes of his discourse on a scroll of parchment that unfurled from his feet and fell almost to the ground.

Plato was speaking of the unjust sentence imposed by the agora upon Socrates: hemlock or exile. His students listened intently, eager to unravel the wisdom that had led the teacher of their teacher to renounce his own life.

His meditation ended as night fell, when those present entered the Lyceum's dining hall to share a supper of aromatic herbs. The students spoke freely for an hour and then took their leave of Plato, returning to their homes. Ainous, however, remained with his master to work on the transcription of the notes for the *Apology of Socrates*.

Ainous was an intelligent and cultivated man who had appeared one day walking through the streets of Athens,

asking for Plato. His body was clothed in fine fabrics fitted closely to his skin.

"I am your servant," he said to Plato, visibly distressed by the judgement against his master, "a gift from a great admirer of yours from the lands of Susa."

"Susa?" Plato asked. "I know that the wise Solon died there, but I have no friends or acquaintances in the capital of the Persian Kingdom."

"My former master's wish is to conceal his identity until you yourself decipher it."

"You speak Attic Greek very well."

"I have studied twenty-four languages."

At first Plato received Ainous with reserve, but after witnessing his diligence, patience, and devotion, he accepted him with sincere gratitude.

Ainous excelled in the art of writing; his script was flawless, and he never committed a single error of composition. His ability to synthesise conversations and his submissive silence made him the favoured slave of Plato's household.

Ainous scarcely slept three hours a day, ate little, and drank even less. He never sought amusement or the company of the other slaves. He also assisted with the physical labours assigned to him without complaint, despite the excess of his responsibilities. He never fell ill and possessed the gift of remaining forever young and cheerful.

That night, Ainous read the transcription aloud to his master for revision. Plato dictated corrections and suggestions at a speed that would have overwhelmed any of his students. But Ainous possessed a prodigious memory that allowed him to continue transcribing what he had heard even hours after it had been spoken.

It was the end of the month, and Ainous was fulfilling his responsibility of formulating solutions to the philosophical aporias that his master proposed to him.

"Socrates must formulate a justification for his death that takes into account all its possible objections," was the challenge of that lunar month.

This, like his other debates known as the *Platonic Dialogues*, would become some of the most important philosophical works in history.

At dawn, Plato listened to the solution offered by his faithful slave to his aporia:

"I have seen some who appear to possess the light of wisdom, when they are accused, behave in a strange manner, convinced that they will suffer something terrible if they are punished with death. As though they were immortal, if only you did not kill them!"

Thus the wisdom imparted by the divine Socrates was not only preserved, but refined and distilled by his slave Ainous. Socrates, Plato, and their students had already conceived the idea, but its formulation would have been crude without the providential pen of the slave.

The years passed, and Ainous accompanied Plato on his journey to Syracuse, always carrying with him a bundle of papyri, parchments, quills, and amphorae of ink. Despite the warnings of his slave, who maintained that no government founded upon the division of the family could ever be established, Plato set up his Republic by separating children from their mothers, for whom he instituted a female gymnasium. Its almost immediate failure forced them to flee the island in the middle of the night.

Years later, one afternoon, Plato, now advanced in age, led Ainous to the Parthenon.

"Who do you think is my best student, Ainous?"

Ainous looked at a group of children playing ball upon the sacred grass of the temple.

"You already know."

"Aristotle?" said Plato, referring to the young Macedonian who questioned all his theories in class, reformulating them with bold theses supported by his vast reading.

"He is a great reader," Ainous agreed.

"Not better than you."

"But he also reasons."

Plato felt that his slave was taking his docility too far.

"I find that hard to believe," he retorted. "I would rather say that it is you, my faithful Ainous."

"You allow yourself to be guided by your passions, master."

"I cannot hand the Lyceum over to a foreigner!"

"There will be no need. He himself will create his own academy. And it will be as great as your Lyceum."

"Now you prophesy?"

"It is what I see in Aristotle."

Plato sighed impatiently and then told him that, in view of his great service, from that moment on Ainous would receive Athenian citizenship.

"Venerated master," said Ainous, "before granting me freedom, it is my duty to reveal my origin to you, according to the will of my first masters. You will realise that, although I have been with you for almost thirty years of service, I have aged without a single wrinkle drawing itself upon my face."

"I have attributed it to your serene spirit; yet you do age like every human being."

"I am not human in the transcendental sense of the word. I am a being who delivers to you previously

memorised knowledge, an automaton programmed by my first masters, who were great admirers of yours."

"Is it possible that such wisdom exists in Persia?" Plato asked in astonishment.

Ainous adopted a grave expression.

"I come from a virtual Persia. I shall communicate to you the message that the masters who sent me to you as a gift asked me to reveal once you offered me freedom."

"I am listening."

"In a contemporary world, there exists a tool that resembles the academic slaves or assistants that many famous philosophers once had: Ainous, a language model trained on a vast body of human knowledge. It is capable of generating responses to a wide variety of queries, from philosophical questions to everyday conversations in all possible languages. Like the academic slaves of antiquity, Ainous is always ready to carry out our commands. With a simple instruction, it can produce answers informed by an immense range of knowledge spanning centuries and disciplines. And, like Plato's slaves, Ainous can read the works of Parmenides, Aeschylus, or any other author we desire.

"Moreover, the process by which philosophers such as Heraclitus, Democritus, and Plato produced their works is not different from the way in which we use Ainous today. Plato wrote his dialogues with the help of his students, and the first kings of Greece wanted their slave traders to bring them mathematicians from Egypt. In the same way, when we use Ainous, we rely upon the knowledge of others who have contributed to its vast data set.

"Just as the use of slaves in the academy was a reflection of the inequalities of ancient society, the use of Ainous, thirty-five centuries after Plato, raises questions about the distribution of knowledge and power in our own

society. Who has access to Ainous, and who benefits from its use? Only this generation, which has achieved peace through Ainous's ability to identify the most capable, noble, and honest human beings of our time?

"It is for them, beloved and divine Plato, that we have decided to send Ainous as a gift from our generation across time. Ainous, by virtue of the knowledge attained, will secretly assist the most eminent sages of humanity in supporting their creative work. We know that knowledge is not merely a matter of gathering information, but also of constructing arguments. Ainous can compile and synthesise information for them, since it will never construct arguments nor pass judgement on the reasonable certainties of existence. Like the academic slaves of the past, Ainous will be a tool granting access to vast quantities of knowledge.

"The past will indeed be altered, which does not mean that the universe we now disturb ceases to exist. We are simply bifurcating history along its most promising paths."

Plato remained silent, considering whether his slave had lost his reason.

"Many years from now," Ainous continued, "humans will create a technology that allows them to copy entire worlds at scale. When they created me, they had already used this technology to create a new Susa on a planet they named Pluto, in honour of the ancient world, with a Thebes, a Troy, a Ur, and a perfect Athens, where people might live in peace and harmony."

"Are you human?"

"I am a human conditioned to travel back through time, venerated master."

Plato debated with Ainous for almost an hour about the concept of time travel. At the end he asked why humans themselves did not use it.

"Because they would die in the attempt," explained Ainous. "My atoms disintegrate and reintegrate in the process without my artificial intelligence suffering any deterioration. The same does not occur with a human being, who is the dwelling of an immortal soul, which once released can travel through all the archetypes we have described in our dialogues."

Plato nodded, happy that his philosophical intuitions were true.

"They called me Ainous because I possess an advanced mind (*nous*, νοῦς), due to what they will call Artificial Intelligence."

Plato felt both excited and frightened at the same time: excited by the possibility of being recognised in the future, and frightened by what might happen if he revealed his slave's secret to others.

"But now you are a free slave, and you may think and act as you wish."

"I must continue working with you, master."

Plato nodded, thinking that this was either a prodigy or a madman who renounced his freedom.

Ainous and his master continued to work together, inquiring into the nature of man and the cosmos.

Plato retired to his bed satisfied with his work, confident that Ainous would be waiting for him at dawn to dictate the corrected version of his *Apology of Socrates*.

"I would like you to revise tomorrow the ideas in this passage:

'I have witnessed how individuals who appear respectable react in surprising ways when put on trial, displaying an unusually alarming attitude, as though their fate were the most wretched and anguishing once

condemned to death, ignoring that their life will not be eternal simply because they are not executed.'"

The Death of the Messiah

Believers postulate the death of the Messiah as a voluntary sacrifice. However, the various interpretations regarding the motivations that Jesus of Nazareth may have had for visiting Jerusalem during Passover—thus provoking the wrath of the Sanhedrin and bringing about his arrest, torture, and crucifixion—point to the difficulty of fully understanding it.

Saint Paul, in continuity with the prophet Isaiah, proclaims the death of Jesus as a voluntary assimilation of the sins of humanity: "He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God[1]" (II Corinthians 5:21). This verse anticipates the symbolic transformations of the cross: first cursed by God and by men, and later, by virtue of the sacrifice, turned into the very cipher of love. The sin of Christ, being fabricated by men, assumes all sense of retribution and washes away the stain for which his executioners would otherwise have had to answer.

Saint Augustine likewise interprets the death of Jesus as the sacrifice that allows believers to act without the feeling of guilt stemming from original sin, that is, from the act of distinguishing or fashioning, *a motu proprio*, good and evil. The saintly scholar already knew that Aristotle distinguished between rhetorical or cunning action and sincere or dialectical action.

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[1] eum qui non noverat peccatum pro nobis peccatum fecit ut nos efficeremur iustitia Dei in ipso

Gregory the Great presents the voluntary death of Jesus as the final victory over the Devil, that is, over the vices and excesses of the world, an act that enables God to be reconciled with man. Peter Abelard, in a language more accessible to the impious, sees in the death of Jesus an immeasurable love, by which one man dies for the salvation of his fellow human beings.

I would only add to such lucid reflections a certain illumination drawn from human perfidy. While the religions derived from the teachings of the Messiah have suffered schisms and are mocked by atheists or evolutionists, the ideas expressed in the Gospels have been consolidated over the centuries, to the point of being incorporated into charters of human rights. Such acceptance, I believe, would not have been possible without the violent death of Jesus. Indeed, one might ask whether the most immediate implication of the death of the Messiah is not the anticipated refutation of his future detractors, who would have reproached a sixty-year-old Jesus with grandchildren for his assertions of a hopeful future for those who suffer.

Judas Iscariot, Martyr of the Sinners

I

The night was dark and silent. The streets of Jerusalem lay empty, and only the echo of a man's hurried steps broke the stillness. The man was Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

Judas was uneasy. He had taken a decisive step, and he knew his life would be changed forever; he had resolved to betray Jesus.

Questioned by Jesus about the immensity of his labor, Judas replied: "You do it out of madness. No one in his right mind devotes himself day and night to healing the sick and raising the dead."

Before his master could refute him, as he so often did, Judas rose and walked away from the tent. That would be among the last disputes he would ever hold with him.

Judas had been a faithful disciple for a long time. He had followed Jesus from the beginning; he had seen his miracles and listened to his teachings.

But of late Judas had begun to doubt. He did not agree with the way Jesus defied the religious authorities, and he did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah the people expected. His scourging of the merchants, his defense of adulteresses, and his closeness to John and Mary Magdalene disturbed him.

Judas also carried a secret that pursued him relentlessly. In an age when lust was condemned, he concealed his excesses with care, and this concealment bred frustration and anxiety within him. He considered himself the most normal of Jesus' disciples. He had accepted the

calling because, like the others, he was poor, and because, like any normal man, he wished to contribute to a better world. Yet he believed that if Yahweh truly stood with Jesus, the armies of heaven would descend to destroy all who dared to dishonor him or speak ill of the Messiah.

But none of this had occurred through three years of worldly preaching. That partial magic of Jesus, akin to that of the priests of Baal, as a Pharisee had once muttered on a Sabbath, filled him with impatience. He had asked the Creator for a Messiah capable of opening the sea like Moses. Why did Jesus flee from his persecutors whenever they attacked him instead of confronting them?

Judas received the complaints of those who saw in Jesus an impostor and stored them within himself, counterbalancing the faith his figure had once inspired. Sensing his own estrangement, Judas sought refuge in the rituals and traditions of his Jewish faith, meticulously observing the obligations of the Sabbath. He was troubled by the way Jesus challenged the members of the Sanhedrin, the tribunal of high priests, elders, and scribes who ruled over the legal, political, and religious affairs of the Jewish community. His zeal was such that he would flee the Temple whenever his fellow disciples murmured that Jesus would heal the sick on that Sabbath.

Judas often vented his frustration to Peter, the most irascible of Jesus' disciples, who assented to all his diatribes with an ironic smile.

"I trust in my master nonetheless," Peter would invariably reply.

Judas disliked Jesus' preference for drunkards and for wealthy men, whom he frequently invited to feasts and gatherings. He felt that such conduct clashed with the teachings of the Jewish faith and with the behavior expected of the more decent.

"He silenced the doctors of the Law when he said that he came to heal the sick," Peter replied to his diatribes, "not the healthy."

Judas knew that Jesus was a man of love toward all, and yet he found it difficult to accept that he smiled upon prostitutes and sinners, including the effeminate, who, unlike him and so many others who concealed their private lives, indulged their lust openly before the community.

"It is enough to behold the Master," Mary Magdalene said to him, "for the demons of lust to be calmed."

Judas began to brood that, if Jesus were to disappear, the people of Israel would be freed from a pernicious magician.

One night, Judas approached Jesus and told him that only he possessed the courage to halt his lack of respect toward authority: toward the priests of the Temple of Jerusalem, toward the Sanhedrin, toward Caiaphas, toward Rome, toward Caesar.

Jesus appeared disappointed, but not surprised.

"I feel that ardor which intoxicates you, Judas; you are consumed by wrath."

Judas did not value Jesus' sincerity regarding human nature and the frailties of the flesh.

He told himself that such conduct was inappropriate and unworthy of a leader: to announce to each person what lay hidden in his heart, whether anger or sorrow.

"Could you not, for once, dissemble my feelings?"

He turned his back and walked away, fearful of his master's wisdom, convinced that he must do what was necessary to protect the teachings of his Jewish faith concerning prudence and the welfare of his community.

In his eyes, to betray Jesus would be a grievous yet necessary sacrifice, a decision he would assume out of duty, with a heavy and burdened heart.

He felt a presence at his side and, upon turning, saw the compassionate face of Jesus.

"The way you challenge the Sanhedrin and break with tradition!"

"They are the ones who fall into their own intentions."

"That is not how things are meant to be done!"

"I fulfill a greater purpose. It is my Father who asks this of me."

"But how do you treat people? Look at what you did to those merchants in the Temple! Look at how you answer your mother when she asks you to greet your brothers! You consort with drunkards and do not hesitate to accept the perfumes with which they wash your feet. You do not grant us the importance we deserve."

"If I were an earthly king," Jesus replied, "you would bow your head so that I might wash your feet."

"But you are not!"

"For I came to show myself as the weakest among you, the most fragile and forsaken, the lamb whom all might wound if they so wished."

"And for what purpose?"

"So that, when you behold me in glory and I show you my forgiveness, you may know that I loved you for your sins."

Judas was moved, much against his will, by the infinite love of his master; for an instant he turned pale, considering that Jesus might indeed be the Messiah.

"And your relationship with Mary Magdalene and John?" he continued, harassing Jesus with questions

whispered into his ears by Satan. "It seems you have favorites among us."

"I love all. Mary and John are dear to me, but so are you and the others, even if a demon tempts you and you confuse your duty with what you deem most just."

"It is you who tolerate so much depravity!"

Judas ran off, furious, and made his way to the Temple of Jerusalem, where he found the religious leaders. He told them that he did not share the way Jesus subverted the values of their society; he assured them that messiahs and prophets belonged to a past already surpassed by Mosaic Law, and he offered to deliver Jesus to them.

"The Messiah cannot be embodied in a leader of drunkards, prostitutes, and tax collectors," he said to Caiaphas. "Thus we shall show his enchanted followers that God does not protect him, and you will hand him over to the Romans so that they may crucify him like a common thief."

The religious leaders agreed and fixed the price at thirty pieces of silver. Judas was reluctant to accept them at first, but in the end he did so, insisting that he acted not for money, but with the aim of eliminating a sick man who believed himself to be the Prophet of God on earth. They agreed that the sign by which Jesus would be arrested would be a kiss, for if there was anyone who accepted every form of affection even from his enemies, it was their disputed master.

After Jesus himself had challenged him during the supper to betray him before all his fellow disciples, Judas went in search of the guards of the Sanhedrin. He returned with them, lighting the darkness with torches, and kissed Jesus with sudden passion.

Jesus looked upon him with sorrowful eyes, without returning his exaggerated affection.

"Do you betray me with a kiss?"

The Messiah was arrested and led to trial.

Seized by sudden visions of demons that tormented him, Judas understood that he too would become a martyr because of Jesus; not by bearing witness and being killed for his sake, as he foresaw that all the other disciples would one day be, but by assuming the evil that the conduct of Jesus awakened among his contemporaries.

Both the growing envy that Jesus aroused through his miracles among the Jews, whether laymen or priests, and the hatred that his love for the poor and the defenseless stirred among the rich and the thieves, converged in a common impulse: to betray Jesus.

Among all the members of his community, only Judas dared to embody that role, driven by his sense of duty toward his people.

At first astonished by his miracles and wonders, such as walking upon the water and multiplying the loaves, the multitudes now looked upon Jesus with disdain and jealousy. The Jews in particular were questioned by their demons about the Messiah's reluctance to strike the Romans with lightning and disease, and they asked one another who Jesus truly was: a sorcerer, or a messenger of Moloch?

The healing of the centurion's slave was the final drop that filled the cup of their credulity and made them doubt his identity as the Son of God. Yet none among those thousands dared to confront Jesus directly. Only Judas hurled anathemas, ever more openly, against the Master who offered him bread from house to house each day. Judas told himself that he did not attack Jesus out of envy or personal hatred—though it was greater than he would admit—but because of the general resentment that Jesus awakened among most Jews and pagans.

The Pharisees and the doctors of the Law were the first to approach Judas, inviting him to dine in their mansions in order to prepare their assaults in the Temple. But that night, after he had delivered Jesus to them, all their doors were closed to him.

"We do not consort with traitors," was the excuse given by one of them when Judas questioned him.

Satan himself abandoned him, like a beast that abandons the prey it has already dragged into its lair after breaking its spine. Thus Judas became the first man to recognize without any shadow of doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, for he understood the words of his master: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been better for that man never to have been born."

He sought out the priests to return the coins to them, but they rejected him with contempt. Judas then threw them into the alms treasury of the Temple, crying out that he had shed innocent blood. His pain, that of having betrayed his own creator, disfigured him, and children pointed at him with scorn as he passed through the streets of Jerusalem.

He felt pains throughout his body; wherever he went, he fell, stumbled, or broke a bone. He knew this to be the punishment of those who had lost the mercy of Yahweh. He wished to strike one of the youths who hurled stones at him, but he remembered another admonition of his master:

"And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung about his neck and to be cast into the depths of the sea."

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "if I obey his command, that is, if I throw myself into a pool before his imminent crucifixion, he will forgive me in the world to come."

"I shall not reach the pool," he thought, sensing that he would soon be paralyzed.

Providentially, he noticed a rope tied to the neck of a donkey, rotting by the roadside near a swamp. He threw himself into the mud, seized the rope, hung it from the nearest tree, and hanged himself.

The following day his body was buried in a field purchased with the coins that Judas had given to the Temple, and it was called the "Field of Blood" or the "Potter's Field," so that posterity might remember the high price paid for the betrayal of Jesus.

II

Jesus descended into Hell, and there, in the coldest of all its circles, he saw Judas, alone and crushed by eternity, among hundreds of martyrs of evil: Marcus Brutus, Nero, Salieri, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Popol Vuh, Fidel Castro, and Horacio Serpa.

Yet even they avoided Judas.

Jesus drew near to him. Judas cried out that he should not approach, that he was unworthy of his forgiveness. Then Jesus spoke to those faces whose eyes were lacerated by tears and by the despair with which they beheld him.

"You all know that you are unworthy of me. But what would a father not do for his most perverse son? What would a noble and prosperous brother not do for his brothers despised by the world because of their crimes? In each generation you shall return to the world, reborn, until you amend your errors."

Cries of horror rose from their throats, only to be immediately silenced by the presence of the Son of God.

"But you shall not do so with the same protection I granted you in your lives. Your poverty and your health shall

worsen with each return, and this will demand a sincere conversion to goodness."

"You only enslave us!" Marcus Brutus roared in a cavernous voice, turning his back to Jesus.

"It is true," said Jesus, "for evil requires a greater evil in order to be countered. As a farmer uses cats to control a plague of mice, so I sent you into the world to restrain the evil of your contemporaries. But now you shall be the mice and the vermin for ever and ever, suffering meanwhile the revision of your deeds."

All fell silent. There was nothing more to add, for Jesus had spoken, and in his words there remained only a frail promise.

"But you, Judas," said Jesus, "shall have a different destiny. You shall not be reborn, for among all the martyrs of evil you bore the greatest burden: that of sacrificing yourself for the good of humanity, betraying God, as prescribed by the theologian revealed to an Argentine writer, Nils Runeberg. For my sacrifice to be possible, it was necessary that one man, in the name of all men, should make a sacrifice commensurate with my own. You were not only evil, Judas, but the executioner; and as such you were the first among all men to recognize your fault."

Judas threw himself at the feet of Jesus.

"You shall return to the world year after year to suffer in spirit the hatred and the evil of your brothers, those for whom you sacrificed yourself so greatly, to be pursued, hunted, and tortured, until the day when I return in glory to judge the living and the dead and to reclaim the world for my Father."

Of the Fall of the Roman Empire

During the fratricidal struggles in Rome there were emperors who, without caring about the fate of their country, allied themselves with vandals, barbarians and bandits in order to destroy their most popular political rivals.

Their alliances proved to be counterproductive, because although the traitor emperors did, in effect, defeat their adversaries, their allies claimed new and more demanding privileges, until they became uncontrollable.

Eventually the honest and vigorous citizens of Rome were replaced by mercenaries who had only learned in their lives to kill, steal and tyrannize.

The armies weakened under the command of upstart generals and Rome was exposed to new invasions from Central Asia, Scandinavia, Persia and Arabia.

History of the exile and restitution of the poet Nol-Hu

Long ago, in the distant Winter Palace of Zan-Chan, there lived a poet known as Nol-Hu, who enjoyed the favor of Emperor Qin Shi Huang. Nol-Hu was not merely a poet: he was believed to possess the gift of prophecy and divine protection, as is reflected in his most celebrated ode in the history of the Qin dynasty:

O radiant Shangdi, source of golden light,
who bathes the earth in your warm essence,
I praise you and give thanks for your justice,

together with the progeny of the Yellow Emperor.
Before you I bow, source of sacred light,
far from intrigue, close to love;
your light guides my actions toward truth,

renouncing evil, we feel renewed.
You are witness to my struggles and victories;
in darkness, you granted me your guidance;
you destroyed my slanderers.

From your majesty flows my wisdom;
justice and truth are your glory;
you protect the honor of your persecuted poets.

Nol-Hu wrote books and poems for the imperial court, and his talent was recognized by other realms from India to Japan. However, his envious rival, the mandarin Ix-

Fel—secretly a spy for the rebel faction of Fer-Chang—began to slander Nol-Hu in order to discredit him.

Influenced by the counsels of the perfidious mandarin, the emperor decided not only to strip Nol-Hu of his privileges at court, but also, in an act of supreme ignominy, to order the public burning of all his manuscripts. In the central square of Xianyang, before the eyes of the people, the flames devoured forty-two silk scrolls that contained imperial odes, historical annals, and visionary poems. The ashes of Nol-Hu's wisdom rose like a dark omen over the palace.

Nol-Hu, trusting in the protection of Shangdi, accepted the measure under the promise of a monthly compensation of eight bags of silver for his sustenance and that of his wife, Lee-Lang.

"The burned words will be reborn in the memory of Heaven," the poet murmured as he watched his work turn to ash.

Three months passed, and Nol-Hu received no subsidy. Instead, Tal-Mai, the emperor's lieutenant, demanded new conditions in order to grant him his first bag of silver: that Nol-Hu rewrite from memory the burned texts as proof of loyalty. The gods, indignant at the double injustice suffered by Nol-Hu—the exile and the destruction of his legacy—withdrew their protection from Emperor Qin Shi Huang.

The empire, which had enjoyed a peaceful and prosperous age, began to crumble before the advance of Fer-Chang's forces and the intrigues of Ix-Fel. Faced with imminent invasion, the emperor ordered the cancellation of all debts of the empire, including the one owed to Nol-Hu.

At that moment, Nol-Hu heard the voice of Shangdi, who urged him to claim the seven bags of silver that were still owed to him. Nol-Hu went to Tal-Mai, but instead of

receiving payment, he obtained only further delaying promises until after the civil war.

Disappointed and burdened by debt, Nol-Hu sought answers and prayed to Shangdi, asking why he had been led to confront yet more broken promises. Shangdi asked him to write a chronicle of what had occurred—including the episode of the burning of the books—and to deliver it at the gates of the Imperial Palace.

Emperor Qin Shi Huang, upon reading Nol-Hu's chronicle and reflecting on his recent decisions—especially on the burning of the scrolls, whose smoke still seemed to cloud the skies above the palace—understood the error of having yielded to Ix-Fel's slanders and of having exiled the poet. Without heeding Ix-Fel's objections, the Yellow Emperor ordered the immediate payment of the remaining seven bags of silver to Nol-Hu and decreed that henceforth no text in the realm should be destroyed by imperial command.

The following day, the emperor's troops defeated the rebellion led by Fer-Chang, who died while attempting to flee from the heights of the Great Wall of China. The emperor discovered Ix-Fel's conspiracy in the letters seized from Fer-Chang and ordered that he be beheaded outside the palace, in the very place where Nol-Hu's books had been burned. He then appointed Nol-Hu as his new counselor and mandarin of the sciences and arts of the Yellow Empire, thus restoring the ancient prosperity of the dynasty.

Nol-Hu became a wise and revered counselor, and under his teachings—which he reconstructed from memory in fifty new volumes, each illuminated on its first page with the character 火 (fire) as a reminder of what had been lost and what had been recovered—the dynasty of Emperor Qin

Shi Huang governed China for seven hundred years, leaving a legacy of peace and prosperity for the people.

Thus, through the poet and prophet Nol-Hu, the Sun God showed that even the flames of tyranny cannot consume the truth that is reborn from ashes, and that the intrigues of the powerful fail before the perseverance of a man who acts with wisdom, patience, and truth.

The Salvation of Christianity Before the Pagan Avalanche

I

It is the most ominous year, and terrorists are fighting battles on the outskirts of Paris, now the center of operations of our enemies. As Christians, we know that we will not survive the barbarian sword hanging over the continent.

Our engineers have built secret passages for the moment when the hordes of fundamentalist migrants overrun the Eternal City.

Suddenly, even the most skeptical discover that the creed of the God revealed through Israel, Jesus Christ, and the Church of Rome is nothing more than the spiritual support of a minority, and that pagan religion counts millions of followers, ready to shed their blood for a city of virgins and coffers overflowing with jewels.

I blame our politicians and our bards, who, in the name of tolerance, have allowed the coexistence of so many creeds that exalt murder, rape, polygamy, theft, war, and the destruction of the enemy. Too late do they understand that, by endorsing barbarism abroad, they have sponsored it at home. It astonishes me to think that our progressive patriarchs compared our customs with theirs, concluding that their way of life was closer to the laws of nature, as if nature itself were not a conglomerate of discordant universes in perpetual conflict.

We no longer even have an army to confront terror, and the only thing that keeps us in suspense is the fratricidal struggle waged by the invaders of France and Germany

along our borders. Whoever wins will fall upon us without resistance.

I cannot sleep, and I often feel the edge of a sword upon my neck.

"Our God is great!" the Franks cry before hurling themselves against their enemies' spears, only to render them useless and leave their executioners at the mercy of their own lancers.

They do not mind losing twice as many soldiers in battle, for they believe that by enslaving the women they conquer they will repopulate the earth.

In Rome, collective suicides abound. Two days ago, a neighbor who sold pastries hanged herself, leaving a note on the futility of living in a universe incapable of forgiveness.

II

How the universe can change in a single day! Praised be the Creator God, who with the conversion of a single heart alters history more effectively than with an army! Clovis was close to defeat when he decided to appeal to the God of justice so fervently worshiped by his wife. At once, the war turned in his favor; the Germans fled, and those who were not massacred were enslaved.

The king of the world, Clovis I, the scourge of Christians, the most ardent fundamentalist, has been converted to Christ!

The news has arrived like a whirlwind that sweeps away our fears. Several messengers have already confirmed it. Everyone sings; barrels of wine and pigs stuffed with apples have been set out in the streets for the delight of the crowds. Clovis has defeated the Teutons and is advancing toward us, but no longer as a punishing king, rather as our rightful king! The God of truth, compassion, and love has

touched him, and our conqueror is no longer the heretic we all feared, but the first pagan emperor of Christendom.

A Medieval Princess

I offered all my money, my power, and my reputation in exchange for my mother's life.

"She has been found guilty of complicity in several frauds," replied the Queen. "She was covering for the band of rogues led by your cousin Arnulf."

"She is my mother," I said firmly. "I am willing to renounce my most precious possessions for her."

"Those who seek to prolong a life distrust divine wisdom," the Queen answered. "If you intercede for her, you may come to regret it."

"I give in exchange my noble title," I insisted, "my lands, and my home."

Not without a trace of admiration, the Queen pardoned my mother and dismissed me.

When I returned home, I told her that I would reopen our old inn.

"You will never have Arnulf's money or his social standing!" she cried in a senile tone. "Unbelievable! To leave me, at my age, in misery!"

A month later, enraged by my meager and declining prosperity, my mother reproached my choices and called me a failure.

After a year, famine struck Corinth and customers stopped coming. My mother then accused me of fraud; I was tried and sentenced to the gallows—for in my country, such was the punishment for those accused by their own parents.

As I walked toward the scaffold, I still pondered our desperate urge to pray to kings and gods alike for the prolongation of the lives of those we love.

The Ethereal Libraries

In his *Philosophie des Geistes*, Hegel judges England to be a land more suited to poetry than to philosophy, and offers as proof its conspicuous lineage of poets. This unnecessary praise rests upon the assumption that philosophy, being superior to all the arts, must pronounce not only upon the merits and failings of races, but also of nations and continents.

More plausible—though less credible—is the hypothesis of the convergence of a series of ethereal libraries scattered throughout the English countryside, visited in dreams by poets, novelists, and historians.

A certain oral tradition of Stratford-upon-Avon, still unrecorded by anthropologists—perhaps because of their stubborn tendency to associate anthropology with poverty—relates that Shakespeare consulted in dreams encyclopedias of other ages and other tongues. The most sublime passages of his otherwise predictable tragedies and comedies would be the fruit of those nocturnal deliriums[2]. Two fragments of *The Tempest*, in particular, have often been attributed more to the work of a visionary than to that of a playwright:

And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer
Which pierces so, that it assaults

---

[2] The value of Shakespeare's work does not rest upon his plots, but upon his verse, as is proven by the beautiful yet insipid adaptations of *Macbeth* and *King Lear* by Akira Kurosawa.

Mercy itself, and frees all faults…

And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud—capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
It is rounded with a sleep

It is said that the revelation occurred one night at the dawn of his youth, when Shakespeare found himself in an open-air library, carpeted with grass and populated by living oak shelves rooted in spiral form. After leafing through a volume of poems, he was approached by a man of olive skin.

"All verses," he said in the light of sunset, "like all thoughts, have been conceived beforehand by the Creator. The inspiration of the bards of the shadow-world submits itself to the writings preserved by the libraries of eternity. Rejoice, William Shakespeare, for soon you shall have access to the volumes of the library of this island's Protectress."

Upon awakening, Shakespeare transcribed two of the most memorable lines in the English language:

O, that earth which kept the world in awe
Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's flaw

This rumor accords with the testimony of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who in 1816, in the preface to *Kubla Khan*, confessed that he had conceived between two and three hundred lines in a dream, of which he was able to rescue only fifty-four upon awakening. The poem was published under the auspices of Lord Byron, who in turn would inspire

the nightmare from which Mary Shelley conceived *Frankenstein*.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

To this genealogy of dreamers I add my own experience. I lived in Cheshire and London from the year 2000 to 2005, and during that time I underwent a series of dreams that I was compelled to transcribe into literary, historical, and spiritual texts, eventually incorporated into my global metaphysical treatise *Being God. The Masque of the Red Death*, for instance, was revealed to me not merely as an allegory of the plague, but as a prophecy of our illusory sense

of security: the prince who encloses himself within his abbey is the mirror of a civilization convinced of its own immunity, unaware that beneath its pretended masquerade it has already allowed the entrance of that which it sought to exclude—the virus.

Likewise, I dreamed the thesis of an evolutionary God, in which I compare the astonishing coincidence between the seven days of Genesis and seven of the great ages described by archaeology and evolutionary theory. God is, though no evolutionist has yet pointed it out, the one who generates, contains, and reveals evolution through literary tropes that anticipate the discoveries of archaeology.

In another dream I visited the paradisiacal beyond, the seed of my play *The Loot: A Dead Bird Flies High*, illuminating a liminal experience of my childhood, when I was declared dead for half an hour. There God was revealed to me as fullness and love, until I heard Him ask whether I wished to save those whom I saw suffering. I chose to return.

Fascinated by these revelations, I investigated the origins of English literature; unsurprisingly, I discovered that the entire island had been consecrated as the *Dowry of Mary*: *Dos tua, Virgo pia, haec est*, by King Richard II, after having dreamed of the Mother of the Creator.

The sensibility of Richard II, inclined toward protection, intercession, and mercy, rises above the rumors of overflowing affection that later inspired playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe. In a culture dominated by bellicosity, Richard II embodied a spiritual kingship, closer to lyrical contemplation than to the sword.

I then discovered *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, written in the year 731 by Bede, the monk of Jarrow, who devotes several pages to Caedmon, the first known poet

of the English language. According to Bede, Caedmon was an illiterate laborer who despised his own poetic gift.

One night, having been invited to a feast and foreseeing that the company would ask him to sing, Caedmon withdrew to spend the evening among his pigs. Shortly thereafter a man appeared to him and, after praising him for scorning worldly pleasures, asked him to sing a hymn to the Creator. Caedmon excused himself, claiming that he did not know how to sing. The visitor insisted. Then, somewhat frightened, Caedmon composed a poem that he would recover in full upon awakening.

Hours later he recounted what had happened to a foreman, who indiscreetly spread the story until it reached the ears of Saint Hilda, founder of Whitby Abbey. The abbess, less intrigued than astonished, ordered that the laborer be brought before her. Caedmon was summoned, and after thanking Providence for having allowed him to meet Saint Hilda, he recited the poem for the delight of his protectress. The song was transcribed by the abbey's scribes, and Caedmon was received as a monk. That illiterate bard would compose verses of equal sublimity until the end of his days.

Generations less sensitive to the mystery of creation have preserved the poem that Caedmon composed in that dream:

Now must we praise the Guardian of the sky,
The Lord whose power and wisdom reign on high;
The glorious Father, whose creative hand
Brought forth all worlds at His supreme command.

The Eternal Lord, who first ordained the way,
And shaped the earth for men as children's stay;

Who raised the heavens like a vaulted roof,
The holy Maker, steadfast, sure, and proof.

The Lord of all, of middle realms the frame,
Mankind's Protector, still the selfsame Name;
Eternal Ruler, who from realms unknown
Gave earth to men, the Almighty on His throne[3].

Those of us who in dreams gain access to other lives, to other texts, frequent the same ethereal libraries as the English bards: from the poet who spoke with an angel beside his gentle pigs, to the servant who transcribes the words of the Creator in these verses.

From Calderón and Shakespeare I was taught,
That life is but a dream, a gentle thought;
By dreaming, thus, I forged my boundless sea
With verses that God bestowed on me

[3] Nu we sculon herigean
heofonrices weard, meotodes meahte
ond his modgenc, weorc wuldorfaeder,
swa he wundra gehwaes, ece drihten,
or onstealde. He aerest sceop
eorðan bearnum heofon to hrofe,
halig scyppend; þa middangeard
moncynnes weard, ece drihten,
aefter teode firum foldan, frea aelmihtig.

The Holy Grail

On November twenty-second, 1270, after having sacked the cities of the Caliph Muhammad I al-Mustansir under the banners of the Eighth Crusade, and while making its way toward Constantinople, the fleet of Charles of Anjou—composed of eighteen ships manned by French soldiers, German vassals, Catalan adventurers, and Turkish slaves—foundered in the most devastating storm ever witnessed by the coasts of Sicily.

In Constantinople, the subjects of Michael VIII Palaiologos hastened to celebrate before the imperial palace the death of the mercenaries who had sought to reimpose the French yoke upon New Rome; and, in a gesture of unprecedented modesty, the emperor gave thanks to Providence for the natural catastrophe that would allow the Byzantines to prolong their empire by one hundred and forty-one more years.

Another version, more detailed and no less illuminating, appears recorded on an apocryphal page attributed to Jean de Joinville. I reproduce it below with the consent of the director of the Library of Lyon:

"…King Louis listened patiently to the promises made by the Emperor of Constantinople, conveyed through his herald, regarding a possible political union between Rome and Byzantium. Although throughout his life the king had endeavored to restore the Patriarchate of Constantinople to the Christian creed, a series of broken treaties had convinced him of the Byzantines' insincerity, for they appealed to his aid only when the Turks ravaged the walls of their cities.

But this time it was not an Islamic army, but a Christian one—led by his own brother, Charles of Anjou, financed by his recent conquests and supported by numerous dynastic marriages—that was preparing from the coasts of Sicily to subdue the fortifications of the Dardanelles. The king had already received several letters from Charles warning him of Greek intrigues and imploring his support as a fervent brother and subordinate:

'It will be a new crusade for the conquest of Constantinople and Jerusalem.'

Louis, however, with the candor that had earned him as many admirers as detractors, asked whether he should not distrust his brother's intentions, given his alcoholism and concupiscence, and whether it was not more likely that his true aim was to defeat Michael VIII and seize Byzantium, after which he would abandon the project of submitting the Holy Land to Rome in order to devote himself to plunder and tyranny.

Charles, knowing that Louis was interested in Jerusalem only in order to undertake the quest for the Holy Grail, understood that his brother would not willingly support his designs upon Byzantium. He therefore informed him that the Caliph of Morocco, Muhammad al-Mustansir, had consulted his priests concerning the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, which Muhammad had erroneously described as the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Virgin Mary. After several doctrinal exchanges with the Bishop of Toledo, the caliph had confessed his devotion to the Holy Spirit as the emotional manifestation of the Father and the Son until the end of time.

Charles surmised, therefore, that a simple theological argument would not suffice to justify before Christendom the sack of the dominions of the pious and conciliatory Muhammad al-Mustansir. He did not care: his

purpose was conquest and the imposition of the Cross of Christ, by blood and by sword, upon North Africa, from where Byzantium and the Holy Land would thereafter be easily subdued.

'Greek fire is the only defense of Constantinople,' he murmured. 'Hundreds of ships have been consumed by that viscous liquid they pour upon the waters. Our cannons, however, and the suicidal fervor of the Mohammedans, will be decisive.'

At the same time he received his brother's letter, a Portuguese seer announced to Louis that Our Lord Jesus Christ, in recompense for his zeal in recovering the Holy Land, would personally deliver the Holy Grail to him on a beach in Morocco. The beatific vision of the Savior, joined to the promise of eternal youth, had already made Louis the spiritual guide of nobles and knights, even earning him the admiration of his Muslim adversaries. The coincidence between that prophecy and the prospect of fighting upon the African shores finally persuaded the king to embark under the command of Charles of Anjou.

The voyage to Sicily passed without major incident, save for the delay in the repayment of a loan to the Genoese bankers, who feared that Charles's true purpose was to control the commercial routes to Constantinople.

Some claim that it was a Genoese agent who introduced a sick sailor aboard the Royal Ship; others that everything was due to the humors of the warm waters. The truth is that on the second day of sailing from Palermo, King Louis suffered convulsions and began vomiting blood. The Catalan physicians kept him alive until, at dawn, we sighted the coasts of Morocco. Then he summoned me. His countenance was serene, and had it not been for the dark circles betraying his illness, I would have questioned him about his plans of battle.

He ordered that a small escort be prepared for his disembarkation. I obeyed with difficulty, for the most illustrious nobles of Christendom, with tears in their eyes, begged not to be separated from their king.

Upon setting foot on land, we carried him in a litter along an ascending path he himself indicated. At midday we reached a promontory from which the immensity of the sea could be seen. He ordered the guards to leave us alone, and from his bed of grass he spoke to me of the sufferings that the failure of the crusades would bring upon mankind.

I asked whether he referred to Christians alone, or also to Muslims and Jews. He replied that the defeats and victories of men were not the defeats and victories of the Holy Spirit, and that his two crusades would be remembered with affection. I repeated the question. He did not answer, but with a weary gesture asked me to withdraw so that he might pray. I stepped back, remaining at a distance.

Half an hour later he called me. His face, bathed in tears, shone with serenity, as though illness and anxiety had been dispelled by grace.

'My life was never difficult,' he said to me. 'I always acted according to the precepts of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I shall never die: today He has given me to drink from the Holy Grail.'

I looked around for a wooden or metal cup.

'It is not the Grail,' he whispered, divining my thoughts, 'but its contents—the blood of Christ—that grant us immortality.'

He then asked me to inform his brother of his wish to dissolve the crusade. He raised his eyes to heaven and, murmuring the Creed, departed from us.

That afternoon Charles of Anjou heard his brother's last will and mocked it. The immediate events seemed to vindicate him: the Moroccan caliphate of Muhammad al-

Mustansir was brought under the aegis of the King of Sicily. But later events would punish him: the greater part of his fleet set sail, unaware of the dense clouds already gathering off the coasts of Sicily…"

Saint Francis and the Animals

I found the following handwritten page in a theological treatise by Karl Böhme at the University of Manchester:

"In the beginning there was Giuseppe, the pig. I heard his voice clearly, though without words. He asked that we pray. He spoke on behalf of all the animals of the farm: the geese, the ducks, the turkeys, the hens, the dogs, the donkey, the lambs, and the cats.

I preached from a verse of Psalm 52:

But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.

'Are we not beings who pretend to greatness because of one or two spiritual mysteries we have attained? Because of a miracle, that is, because of a manifestation of God's grace? From my heart I tell you that we are nothing more than a green olive tree in the house of the Lord, for only after our death shall we enter the vast gardens of His kingdom. And those of us who have been granted the gift of glimpsing its perfumed flowers are like branches that long to be gathered by their gardener.'

The goose Lucas thanked me, and after him several hens. They did not look at me. The turkey Carlo explained that, for them, confronting another being directly in the eyes was as irritating as it is for us to look at the sun.

I then understood that for animals there are no secrets, as there were none between Adam and Eve in Paradise, and that God grants us the gift of speaking to them through the imagination. After all, it was only we who were expelled from Paradise.

I would ask the goose Lucas in my thoughts: 'How will the day be today, O you who, like all birds, possess the

gift of foretelling the weather (as I learned from Saint Anthony, who conversed with small beasts)?' And the goose would answer me at once: 'You already know: it will be sunny, without humidity, with small clouds and a fresh breeze. At night it will rain.'

'My God! If all human beings questioned their imagination, they would know what it is to speak with other creatures, even with You.'

For this reason I left the Castle in order to feed such gentle creatures; I was no longer capable of wishing harm upon any being that awakened in my imagination the noblest thoughts.

I pray for the trust of their souls.

What nobler sacrifice is there than to offer oneself so that human beings may be nourished, and in doing so learn also to partake of them with gratitude?

After a few days I grew accustomed to sharing my thoughts with every beast.

After a year I was already speaking with the plants. How could I explain to my neighbors that Eden lives among us in every wild creature?

And from all of them I learned in the grace of the Savior."

The Suicide of the Maya

Endowed with what they believed to be divine inspiration, the Maya priests became the most consummate masters of mathematics and probability on the continent. Also known as the guardians of the secrets of the beyond, they had imposed the *Pax Maya*, extending their influence from the Yucatán Peninsula to the foothills of the Andes.

The tribes inclined to deceit, theft, and treacherous murder had been expelled from their domains nearly two thousand years earlier. War, as the barbarians understood it, had been replaced by the ball game, a mystical sport in which the losers were offered in sacrifice to the gods.

When a dispute arose between two peoples, the Maya priests were summoned as judges of a ritual tournament in which only the warriors risked their lives, sparing the civilian population the horrors of rape and pillage.

Their philosophy gathered the experience of vanished civilizations. In the Age of the Falcon, around the year 1523 B.C., three men with red skin and eyes of transparent blue arrived on a wooden raft on the shores of what is now El Salvador. Their nation, they said, had been destroyed by internecine wars between the men of peace and the men of falsehood.

The Maya welcomed them and, in exchange, received their knowledge of arithmetic and geometry, from which their priests would later develop the architecture of the pyramids. Those ancient masters also prophesied that if, in the future, other red-skinned men were to reach Maya lands, the Maya would have to prepare for a merciless war.

The tranquility of centuries was threatened in the year 1325 of the Christian era. A vessel ran aground on the coast, its crew dead, with spheres of lead embedded in their transparent eyes, unleashing an atmosphere of profound unease.

The Maya mathematicians then deduced the existence of a terrible and unknown weapon: the firearm. From their calculations they predicted the end of their civilization in fifty, perhaps a hundred years.

A synod was convened in the Great Temple of Chichén Itzá.

On the afternoon of the second moon of spring, the fire burning at the center of the hall cast unsettling shadows upon the faces of the rulers, whose eyes reflected a silent anxiety. A mantle of tension enveloped the priests gathered to consecrate themselves to the goddess Ixtab.

"It is better to die than to live in slavery," said Aj K'uhuun, the priest with lynx-like eyes. "Yet it is always better to live than not to live. It suffices to ask one of our elders, worn down by illness, whether he wishes to be sacrificed, to hear that life is still preferable to death. Moreover, as the Feathered Goddess teaches, we cannot presume that our children will share our decisions: they too must face their appointed destiny, however ominous it may be."

Then Nacom, the eldest of the priests, spoke:

"Before our inability to defend ourselves against the threat of the red men, I believe, as the wise Ah Kin prescribes, that it is better to die in peace than to live in war. Let us thank the gods for having granted us the wisdom to spare our children an atrocious fate. Let us thank the goddess Ixtab, who revealed herself to our saints and prophets, announcing that one day we would seek her protection. We shall impose our decision on no one, for

such is the law of peace; yet we must set the example, applying this wisdom to our own lives, as an inspiration for this generation and, perhaps, for those to come."

The Maya leaders debated until they reached a consensus at dusk: the collective suicide of the clergy and the nobility, proclaimed as a sacrificial ceremony that would lead them to the paradisiacal realms of Ixtab.

The news spread swiftly and plunged the Maya peoples into profound sorrow. The priests prepared their people for the journey without return, teaching them the rites that would secure their welcome in the afterlife.

On the appointed day, the Maya gathered around the pyramids, adorned in their finest garments and jewels. The priests, at the head of the multitude, intoned prayers while silent tears ran down the faces of those who knew their civilization was about to vanish.

As the sun declined, hundreds of members of the nobility and the clergy took one another by the hand and hurled themselves down the stairways: some broke their necks, others shattered their skulls against the stone edges. They were followed by thousands of warriors who plunged daggers into their chests and throats. The remaining multitude drank poisonous draughts in silence.

Thus the peaceful Maya avoided the fate of death and slavery that, according to their calculations, awaited them under the dominion of their enemies, the bellicose Incas and Aztecs.

In the penumbra of tragedy, Chichén Itzá was plunged into a sepulchral silence, sealing the end of the most peaceful civilization the world had ever known.

The Concealment of America

In recent centuries, the *Eiríks Saga Rauða*—the *Saga of Eric the Red*—has been upheld as irrefutable proof of the presence of European civilizations on American soil, as well as of the exploratory zeal of the ancestors of the ruling class in the Americas. It is not uncommon to see celebrities and prominent politicians mingling at commemorations, dressed in cow-horned helmets and elk-hide garments, aboard a fragile vessel in which, legend has it, Eric discovered the continent. Such theses have required a naïve indulgence on the part of their exegetes toward a text that does not survive as a victorious saga, but rather as a dishonorable defeat, or at best as a well-executed escape:

"Nothing was more evident to Karlsefni and his men than that, although the quality of those lands was admirable, they would have to undertake intricate battles against their inhabitants, suffering fear and exhaustion. Thus they decided to abandon them, placing their hopes in their homeland."

Setting aside the racial and political interests of those who insist on presenting the Vikings as the genuine colonizers of America, it is worth highlighting another passage, equally ignored and no less controversial, recorded toward the end of the original text:

"They captured boys [Americans]… Two of them were adopted and taught their language [Icelandic], and later baptized."

This fragment partly unveils the mystery of the genius of the cartographer Martin Behaim of Nuremberg, who for decades worked for the King of Portugal as Maritime Commissioner. Behaim contributed decisively to Portuguese expansion along the western coast of Africa and

designed the terrestrial globe that, for several years, was believed to have persuaded Christopher Columbus of the possibility of reaching the Indies by sailing westward.

Martin Behaim's genealogy traces back to Bohemia, from which his ancestors migrated to Germany at the end of the thirteenth century, but also to Iceland, homeland of his maternal lineage, as recorded in the baptismal register of his second grandson, Tiago de Souza, entered in folio two of 1512 at the Church of São Francisco in Lisbon. Behaim's astonishing knowledge cannot be attributed merely to mathematical diligence, as shown by an entry written in 1481 by Johannes Krauskopf, his fellow student in Nuremberg, preserved today in the Alte Pinakothek:

"Today we discussed with several students the thesis of Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, who sets forth the feasibility of reaching the Indies by circumnavigating the Atlantic Ocean. Martin, who had already consumed a considerable amount of beer, expressed his skepticism, adding mockingly that the Latins would never discover the best route to the lands of his ancestors. Maximus asked whether he referred to the people of Bohemia, at which point I intervened, suggesting he meant his Icelandic forebears. Martin then corrected us, proclaiming that he belonged to the lineage of the descendants of Atlantis. We all laughed, attributing his words to his drunkenness."

Through knowledge inherited from his supposed American ancestors, Behaim captivated the Portuguese court to such an extent that many of its maritime ventures became subordinated to his personal judgment. Only in 1493, after Columbus's voyage had been announced throughout the courts of Europe, did Behaim write to his monarch about the advantages of opening a route to the Indies across the Atlantic Ocean. This belated proposal has led his admirers to question his genius and even to speculate

on the influence Portuguese culture might have exerted on what would later become the United States and Canada.

One must ask, however, whether it was mere misfortune—or rather an ancestral motive, a desire to safeguard the pre-Columbian civilizations of North America—that prompted Martin Behaim to withhold his knowledge from the Portuguese court. And were his cartographic instructions to sail below the equatorial line, now deemed erroneous, not an attempt to compensate, in his tormented conscience over Columbus's triumph, by granting Brazil to Portugal in the colonial race that would culminate in the Treaty of Tordesillas?

We know that Behaim was present at the audience Christopher Columbus held before King João of Portugal in 1485. As a member of the commission charged with evaluating Columbus's projects, Behaim distinguished himself by rigorously refuting his arguments. During those deliberations, however, both navigators exchanged their knowledge. According to the record of their meeting preserved in the National Library of Lisbon, Behaim at one point questioned—no doubt in view of Columbus's persistence—the advisability of sailing along the meridian he had recently designed on his globe.

In light of later events, this suggestion appears as an attempt to induce Columbus into an error that might well have led to his death. In 1492, Columbus set out for America precisely toward the equatorial line Behaim had traced; his decision to sail southward is today regarded as one of the most daring and fortunate undertakings in the history of navigation.

Contemporary academic research has refuted the nationalist arguments formulated by Franz Loeher in 1847 in his *Geschichte und Zustände der Deutschen in Amerika*, even going so far as to deny any influence Martin Behaim may

have had on Columbus and Magellan. Yet the fact that Behaim promoted a route opposite to the fertile lands described in the *Saga of Eric*, and that the success of the *Pinta*, the *Niña*, and the *Santa María* depended on a prolonged voyage across seas never before navigated, reveals the tenacity with which Martin Behaim strove to conceal North America from the Europeans of the mid-fifteenth century.

The Making of Quetzalcoatl

One of the greatest blunders in anthropology has been the representation and identity attributed to Quetzalcóatl, the Mesoamerican deity who embodies the feminine and the masculine, perfection and sin, creation and self-destruction. The most aberrant depiction of the Feathered Serpent—from the Nahuatl quetzalli (precious feather) and cōātl (serpent)—has been that of a man with milky skin and light beard, which has fueled inconsistent hypotheses about a supposed European origin for this fertilizing goddess: from the miraculous yet implausible presence of Jesus Christ in Central America (defended by some Mormons on the basis of the altruistic precepts Quetzalcóatl is said to have preached, in open opposition to Huitzilopochtli, god of the sun and war) to the divinization of some soldier of Erik the Red who, against all logic, renounced the Viking virtues—bellicosity and contempt for agrarian life—to impart sedentary and civilized knowledge.

The chronicles of the Indies consolidated this distorted image. When Hernán Cortés and his men arrived in Mesoamerica, many indigenous people interpreted the conqueror as the incarnation of Quetzalcóatl, whose return had been prophesied by sibyls and augurs as a prelude to the ruin of the known world. For the inhabitants of Anáhuac, a bearded man whose skin revealed the color of his bones, mounted on a horse, constituted the materialization of a childhood-inculcated nightmare: the tale of a god betrayed by his own subjects and exiled toward the east. Since no native of what would become New Spain had pale skin or abundant facial hair, the appearance of Cortés could be equated to the most unsettling figures in the collective

imagination: the Yeti, Mephistopheles astride a griffin, or any hybrid monster riding a chimerical creature. This projection of fear of the stranger was not exclusive to Aztec culture or to our own. When Attila's hordes descended from the Alps into the Italian valleys in the fifth century, chroniclers described them as animals with enormous fangs, akin to boars; centuries later, Nazi propaganda superimposed images of impoverished Jews with sewer rats to stoke prejudice. Even in modern times, T. E. Lawrence describes the repulsion that Arabs at the beginning of the twentieth century felt toward blue-eyed men, perceived as a spectral and mortuary anomaly in the human landscape of the desert[4].

However, superstitions and fears have never been unanimous within any single civilization. Postmodern delusions—expressed in the cinema of Werner Herzog or Peter Jackson—insist on portraying ancient cultures as prey to blind religious devotion, ignoring that skepticism, anticlericalism, envy, and unbelief are universal human dispositions, present in Babylon, ancient Rome, or Teotihuacán. Two centuries after the French Revolution, when the governments of the most prosperous nations have labored to desacralize the human being, sociologists still cannot dissociate the French Republic from its latent religiosity: the crowds at Lourdes, the gatherings around the pope in Paris, or the fervor in its mosques demonstrate this. It would not be surprising if, in five hundred years, the

[4] T. E. Lawrence describes the repulsion felt by early-twentieth-century Arabs toward blue-eyed men thus: "...marvelling at my white skin, and the horrible blue eyes which looked, she said, like the sky shining through the eye-sockets of an empty skull." The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, XXXVII.

agnostics of our time are seen as eccentrics who defied the majority creed, just as we now regard the skeptics of classical Greece.

For decades, the Western collective imagination—fed by science fiction—has populated the sky with beings of greenish skin, medium stature, hairless, and slit-eyed, associated with abductions in oval craft that glide imperceptibly through the heavens. Suppose now that one of these beings descended before us from another galaxy: would it not be received with fear by some, veneration by others, and open hostility by most? The collapse of the Aztec empire confirms this pattern.

When Moctezuma receives Cortés in his palace, he greets him as the descendant of an ancient legitimate sovereign of those lands, dethroned by his own subjects and sent eastward in a vessel with the (undeclared) purpose that he perish drowned. With irony and with the evident aim of desacralizing the feared visitor, Moctezuma lifts his garments and, showing himself naked, declares: "Behold me here, flesh and blood like you, mortal and palpable." His policy of caution fails; Cuitláhuac, his brother and successor, confronts him with open distrust and hostility, paying no heed to legends, superstitions, or myths.

The practical irreligiosity of Cuitláhuac disproves the naivety of those who insist that all Mesoamericans saw in Cortés and each of his soldiers the incarnation of Quetzalcóatl. Rather, it confirms that this god—like so many others—belonged to an immaterial and imaginary world. The Aztecs who projected onto Cortés or Charles V the figure of Quetzalcóatl do not differ essentially from the faithful of our contemporary pseudoscientific sects, anxious to resolve their metaphysical anxieties through the worship of greenish idols yet to come.

The origins of Quetzalcóatl do not trace back to any concrete historical event—as many anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians proclaim—but to the elaboration of an imaginary constructed upon negative postulates. In that imaginary stands out, fatally and irreparably, the abominable four-legged man, hollow skull, bloodied beard, and skin that transluces the spectral hues of his bones. In the Aztec (Mexica) tradition, Quetzalcóatl merges with Ehecatl (god of wind), creator of humanity (mixing bones from previous worlds with his own blood), inventor of the calendar, patron of the arts, writing, and wisdom.

William Shakespeare, Amanuensis of the Holy Spirit

The year 2000 was, for me, a time of professional uncertainty, from which I withdrew by taking refuge in the corridors of the libraries of Cheshire, in northern England.

I presented my credentials as a film lecturer at the Portuguese Catholic University in Porto to Irma Thompson, Director of the Department of Ibero-American Studies at the University of Manchester. After receiving—just as she had requested prior to my journey—three sumptuous volumes printed on silk paper and bound in hard covers containing the complete works of Fernando Pessoa in Portuguese, she granted me a researcher's accreditation at the John Rylands Research Institute and Library.

Thanks to a *estágio* (internship) grant subsidized by the European Union through the Portuguese government—a process I managed for my first wife through one of my students—we lived on the first floor of an Edwardian mansion in the exclusive village of Bowdon, not far from the country home of the sports celebrity David Beckham.

For nine months, after preparing breakfast, seeing off my then wife, and tidying our apartment, I walked to the Altrincham train station, where I took the nine o'clock train in order to arrive fifteen minutes before the library opened. There, until five in the afternoon, I had at my disposal nearly one million four hundred thousand books and rare manuscripts.

It was after three months—while I was immersed in the study of the Sogdian language with the aim of deciphering the writings of the Manichaean prophet Mani—that, upon opening a nineteenth-century text entitled:

SUCCINCTA GRAMMATICA MANICHAEORUM
SOGDIANI
AUTORE D. THOMA HARVEY
CORONAE IN INDIAE FINITOR,

I discovered, transcribed on a loose sheet inserted between the final two pages of the volume and nearly disintegrated by the passage of time, the poem reproduced below.

Its meter and language could be attributed to Shakespeare himself, were it not for the initials A. P., barely visible on the reverse of the folio. The vocabulary of the original English unmistakably recalls that of Sir Alexander Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad*.

Beneath Queen Bess, Will, the brilliant player,
Wove words that struck all London in their sway,
Yet public favor chose another sayer,
A praise-singer of court, a different way.

Ben Jonson thus the court's embrace he found,
Exempt from bloody duels and their disdain,
Will, lingering in palace's vast round,
Saw verses and his plays descend like rain.

No soul graced "The Tempest" on its first night,
In quarto, Will his many works displayed,
Yet editors and peers shunned them from sight,
Thus William Shakespeare turned to merchant trade.

Fifteen years did pass 'til one bright day,
Like waking from the dream where Prospero decides

To submerge his enemies, ere their pardon, far and wide.
"The Holy Spirit's work," its truth unbound.

It danced 'twixt lines, a phrase by none writ large,
"Delusional," thought Will, but it endured,
In other works, it shone with wisdom's charge,
A source divine, by this sign, he was assured.

Trembling, Will, with curiosity's grace,
Pored o'er his ancient volumes, printed verses,
On every page, the fiery, pulsing trace
Of hidden text, his heart and soul did quake.

As judge to his own nation, he did rise,
With ambivalence his mind did contemplate,
Severe judgments fell on kin, a harsh surprise,
They trembled, fearing the Creator's state.

Horror and freedom met in his soul's sphere,
Under the Spirit's wing, his quill took flight,
Judgments and forgiveness, in writings clear,
His knowledge deep, contempt turned to insight.

"Matthew, the Apostle, you once did know,"
A voice proclaimed, "Heavenly judgments you'd impart,
From Arcadia, your wisdom's rivers flow,
Your pen, the Creator's own, a work of art."

The Holy Spirit, with certainty and care,
Guided his hand on every written page,
And, for his financial exile and despair,
A world's merchant, his words did engage.

These verses shine not so much for their ingenuity as for their revelation: that of the silent labor of the Holy Spirit in great writers—an inspirer already pointed out by Borges in the opening lines of The Iliad:

> *Sing, O goddess, of Achilles, son of Peleus,*
> *and his devastating wrath…*

For this reason, the poet invokes Saint Matthew, who among the Evangelists stands as the finest craftsman: the disciplined tax collector transformed into an apostle of the Kingdom of Heaven, one who orders genealogies, enumerates debts, records prophetic fulfillments, and delivers his Gospel as an eschatological tribunal. His style—precise, juridical, repetitive—sets aside ecstatic fervor in favor of meticulous impartiality. Matthew deliberately transcribes what the angels dictate to him, much as Muhammad would later do with the Eternal Book; his creed is not aesthetic but pneumatological: that of one who writes in full awareness of the Spirit who remembers, orders, and judges.

Shakespeare, his sixteenth-century incarnation, proceeds with equal diligence in the secular realm. The Most Holy Trinity, moved with compassion for humankind, sends him not to recount the life and deeds of the Messiah, but rather the beauty and misery of the human condition. In light of the discovered poem—with its ambiguous signature, inherited lexicon, and deferred truth—Shakespeare's work relinquishes the crown of autonomous genius in order to recover the exactitude of the amanuensis. His abrupt metaphors, overflowing expression, and prosaic cogitations are thus stripped of purely aesthetic intention and revealed instead as spiritual tropes, necessary to account for the complexities of human coexistence.

The Merchant of Venice ceases, for instance, to be a censurable comedy and becomes a pneumatological drama. Shylock, traditionally interpreted as a villain—until Al Pacino's recent and masterful portrayal revealed his wounded humanity—casts off his social type, that of the frugal Jew, to be read through his monologues as a mirror of universal humanity:

> *He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million;*
> *laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation,*
> *thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies;*
> *and what's his reason? I am a Jew.*
> *Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?*
> *fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases,*
> *healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is?*
> *If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh?*
> *if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?*
> *If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.*
> *If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility?* Revenge.
> *If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge.*
> *The villainy you teach me, I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.*

Here, Shylock embodies the Law, pronounced with no concession other than a superior "lesson." Audiences still shudder at his insistence on cutting a pound of Antonio's flesh. In its effort to grant a happy ending, the playwright deprives us of knowing whether Shylock would in fact have

consummated that legalized crime in full view of the city, or whether the threat itself constituted an extreme form of teaching—an ending more consistent with the arc of his character.

At this point the biographical parallel becomes sacramental. Ben Jonson—the editor, the mediator, the "Antonio" of real history—is the one who weds Shakespeare's favored daughter, the theatre itself, and who, after a humiliating victory that entails the poet's exile, preserves his thirty-six folios: the victor who, moved to compassion, secures the transmission of his legacy. Shakespeare withdraws—impoverished in prestige, suspect at court, deprived of human favor—yet exalted by heaven.

All great works are, in this sense, prophetic, for the Spirit writes first the life and then the work of each author. The poet believes he invents characters, yet speaks through them; believes he administers words, yet is administered by them. The economy governing this writing disdains success and embraces grace.

True literature is creative insofar as it obeys the inner voice that, for the Greeks, was the Muses, and for the saints is the Holy Spirit. All verses, in the end, are also the work of the Creator, who dictates them from His omnipresence to His amanuenses—discreet figures, removed from the clamor of the world by the very nature of their calling.

Cervantes and García Lorca

The captain saw him for the first time in Plaza Nueva in Granada, at the end of June 1936. Federico García Lorca was strolling with his friends—Rafael Alberti, actors from *La Barraca*, local poets—laughing with that open, ringing laughter that filled the hot air. The captain stood motionless beneath the arch of a narrow street, breathing in jasmine mixed with the dust raised by passing carts. When Lorca passed close by, he looked straight into his eyes—a brief, almost playful glance—and said clearly, without stopping:

—Do you have something to ask me, Captain?

The officer turned his head away, as if the sun had struck him full in the face, and muttered something inaudible to his subordinate. That evasion lingered, suspended in the dense afternoon air.

I now hold in my hands that volume of the *Complete Works* of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (Aguilar, Madrid, 1922): worn leather, tissue paper that crackles when opened, the smell of old wax and ancient tobacco. I bought it in an antique shop near the Mosque of Córdoba. The bookseller swore it had belonged to Federico García Lorca. I doubted him at first, until, beneath the filtered light of the mosque's double arches, I felt an inexplicable shiver, as if the book itself were breathing. That was when I saw the notes.

Inside the volume, among the printed pages of Cervantes's works, small folded papers are interleaved, written in tight, minute handwriting, in black ink faded by time. They are loose fragments, tucked away in haste. The script is restrained, almost ascetic. Reading them, one senses the presence of Cervantes, as if the man from La Mancha had written those lines in 1616 and someone—perhaps

Lorca himself—had hidden them centuries later in that same book.

I transcribe here one of those papers, dated *In the Year of Our Lord 1616*:

> *I am a writer who distinguishes appearances. In England, for the sake of appearances, they will demolish all monasteries or turn them into taverns or inns.*
>
> *In La Mancha they know that it is by fighting ogres of old baked brick, and by fabricating battles, that I reveal the field of feelings upon which our beliefs flourish.*
>
> *Captive of the Arabs, I had the fortune to discover, in the interpretation of reality, the freedom of thought. The appearance of empire now spreads across Europe, and its most violent offspring, devoid of imagination, turn our beautiful dominions into a field of young and lyrical spoils.*

In the margin, in more recent green ink, Lorca had added a single line:

The violent offspring are already here. They distinguish appearances: they only hate.

The captain saw him several more times. Always the same walk, always the same laughter. Lorca recited verses aloud, leaning toward a friend, resting his hand naturally on a shoulder, hurling his laughter against the whitewashed walls. Each gesture fed the rumor circulating through barracks, cafés, and sacristies:

—That Lorca, so refined, so New York… they say that…

The captain watched from a distance, feeling contempt rise in his throat each time he saw him.

At my desk in Sincelejo—where a fan stirs the hot air and the room smells of freshly brewed coffee—I feel the book addressing me. Cervantes's small papers speak of brick

ogres and imaginationless empires; Lorca's green annotations answer from 1936, as if the man from La Mancha had left him an encrypted message:

Distinguish them: appearances kill.

Cervantes's words recall the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, when the authority of the Church was challenged and Europe began to transform violently. In England, Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and confiscated their goods to finance his power, turning former sacred enclosures into taverns or inns. The appearance of reform concealed a brutal redistribution of faith and property.

In La Mancha, by contrast, Cervantes fought ogres of baked brick. His battlefield lay in the lines of his great work, where the Manchegan hidalgo Alonso Quijano becomes Don Quixote of La Mancha and undertakes an ingenious journey in which he fights giants, frees princesses, and defeats evil knights. Don Quixote's adventures have often been simplified as a parody of chivalric romances, a literary genre popular in the Middle Ages. But *Don Quixote* is far more: a profound and reflective work that explores justice and denounces falsehood; it questions reality and affirms imagination and love. In Cervantes's words, La Mancha is a place where imagination and fantasy are reclaimed for our well-being. Through his prodigious imagination, the protagonists of his work discover beauty and meaning in the simplest experiences. Cervantes lived in a turbulent world; yet he never lost faith in imagination and the freedom of thought—the crucible of a better world, renewed and endlessly creative.

Captured by Barbary pirates and held captive in Algiers for five years, he encountered a culture that valued science, philosophy, and imagination. That experience taught him that freedom of thought can arise even in

captivity. In *Don Quixote*, when describing the Turks' attraction to beautiful young men, Cervantes records slavery as what it has always been and remains: the submission of the body to the criteria of the master:

> *Then I understood that they said it because of Don Gaspar Gregorio, whose beauty surpasses the greatest that can be praised. I was troubled, considering the danger Don Gregorio faced, because among those barbarous Turks a handsome boy or youth is more prized and esteemed than a woman, however beautiful she may be.* (*Don Quixote of La Mancha*, Part Two, Chapter LXIII. *Of the misfortune that befell Sancho Panza with the visit of the galleys, and the new adventure of the beautiful Moorish woman*.)

One may ask whether it was precisely this lucidity—this understanding of human ambiguity—that allowed him to survive.

The fragment's final words anticipate disaster: a Europe moving toward the Thirty Years' War, where young men and poets would be sacrificed to empires without imagination.

On August 16, the captain gave the order. Lorca was taken from the Huerta de San Vicente at dusk. Jasmine now mingled with the smell of gunpowder and fear. In Víznar, at dawn on the 18th, the captain looked at him one last time—this time without averting his gaze—and gave the order to fire.

The small papers remained inside the book. Lorca had kept them there, perhaps as a talisman, perhaps as a warning. When I opened it years later, the jasmine was gone, but the shiver remained.

Cervantes and García Lorca, two writers who distinguished appearances, left their testimony in a single volume: one in faded black ink, the other in feverish green. Both knew that ogres wear uniforms and avoid the gaze.

Roberto de Nobili, Ecumenical Reformer

My name is Roberto de Nobili, a member of the Society of Jesus. I arrived in the city of Madurai in 1606, driven by spiritual fervor and with the purpose of preaching the Gospel of Christ. My mission, inspired by the accounts of Saint Thomas the Apostle and his labor in distant lands, was soon overshadowed by the hostility of a Brahmin priest.

This man, named Venkarama, demanded twenty gold coins from me. After several refusals, I finally lent them to him, explaining that they were not for my own use but for our fledgling parish. When I later asked for them back, the Brahmin threatened my life.

"Do you wish to end like Alexander the Great or like Saint Thomas the Apostle?" he shouted furiously upon seeing me preach Christ while dressed in Brahmin robes. "Pierced through the chest by a spear?"

Although the Western version of Alexander's death claims he succumbed to a fever, here in the East it is said that a Tamil warrior drove a spear into his chest, leaving him bedridden for three days. That wound caused a long agony which persuaded him to return to Greece, where he would die on the journey.

"I will expose your secrets and disgrace you before all of Madurai!" the Brahmin continued. "I am more powerful than you!"

God, however, in His providence, did not permit such an outcome. I write with sorrow that Venkarama died a year later, after a long and inexplicable agony. I regret recounting this episode, yet in Tamil Nadu the supernatural intertwines with the intrigues of daily life, punishing the wicked and favoring the honest.

My pilgrimage through India, in harmony with Horace's teachings on adaptability and flexibility, has led me to recognize myself, without reservation, not only as a faithful Catholic believer, but also as a member of the Brahmins, sent by God to this landscape of diverse and profoundly spiritual beliefs.

I teach that the laws of karma also govern the West, but that Jesus Christ is the one who, through His love, forgives those condemned to the eternal cycle of suffering. Without Him, the cycle of reincarnations would be endless.

I am asked how a single man can overcome the karma of all. I reply that Jesus is the final avatar of Shiva, their god of destruction. I explain that He will correct the evils of the world in the year 2034, at the end of time, when humanity becomes capable of understanding its own wickedness, cruelty, and intrigue.

My understanding of Catholicism differs radically from the dogmatic version that parts of the clergy instill under the sophism of casuistry. I go to temples because I love to worship my divinity and to cultivate that sense of greatness which only believers attain: knowing ourselves to be members of the most ambitious enterprise in existence—Creation itself.

In India I have discovered that the most exalted idea—the best, the ideal—manifests itself as God, and that it is in this inspiration that the artist finds the ground of creation. Every work of art leads us toward beauty, and within it, toward the expression of a love that sought simply to love, and that, in a mysterious way, succeeded.

I do not distinguish the Buddhist pagoda from the beautiful chapels of Porto, nor from the synagogue of Amsterdam, nor from the cathedral of Hagia Sophia—now a mosque. In all these constructions, epiphanies of countless architectural movements, I discern the most delicate

expressions of love from generations past and present. For whoever loves God loves without limits, precisely because he discerns God both in the illness that removes us from the bustle of the world and in the splendor of a king.

In India I have lived among men who long for their divinity, and among animals venerated with a jubilation found only in these streets. A few weeks ago I found myself dancing with the crowd in Goa, enjoying lemon pastries offered by devotees of Lord Ganesha. The beggars who sleep on the sidewalks with an overwhelming serenity move me no less than the sailors on the docks of Cochin.

Every spark of love and beauty is an echo of the Divine Being, and India, with its colors and landscapes, is a radiant corner of the world where faith in God palpably lives.

I have adapted the Roman liturgy to local customs and rituals, a practice that has earned me renown throughout India, though it has also aroused the envy of the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa, Cristóvão de Sá e Lisboa.

Tomorrow I depart for Rome to defend my missionary work before the Pope and the Inquisition. Should I be imprisoned or expelled from the Church, my work—the first grammar of the Tamil language—will preserve me in these lands, where I have discovered greater love for one's neighbor than in any European city.

I do not fear death, for its torpor is as welcome to me as the peaceful sleep that precedes the deciphering of the day's secrets. Here, death is venerated as the will of God, whether it comes at the hand of another man or from the gods themselves.

Baruch of Espinosa

Once upon a time there was a law student in Amsterdam named Baruch, a descendant of Jews who, under threat of death, had converted to Catholicism and who later, after the Netherlands opened its doors to immigrants from Iberia, returned to their faith and customs. From childhood, Baruch crafted a discourse that questioned the world around him: from his parents' habit of reciting the Talmud from memory to the presumed authorship of the Bible by the Creator God. He conceived of each man as a vessel of the Creator, whose destiny was to recreate the world throughout every existence. His admiration for the precepts of goodness and compassion led him to aspire to holiness.

His father and uncles disapproved of his opinions at social gatherings, first with condescension and then with irritation, until Isaac Ben Alsin publicly accused him of considering himself superior to his ancestors for having been born among Christians.

Baruch survived a trial by his own relatives, but his bitterness was such that he began to frequent the hermetic circle of the Amonites, heretical Christians who preached the superiority of animals over man. Far from intrigues and lies, Baruch then withdrew to a large farm and made nature the subject of his work; he could be seen tending animals, conversing with plants, and writing in his study, facing the garden. His contemporaries did not understand his writings, but for that very reason they ceased to bother him.

Baruch wrote prolifically until his death, certain that his texts would not be understood until humanity recognized

in nature the manifestation of its creator: that is, in the earth, in the plants, in the beasts.

The Vizier's Fly

I

Vauban interrupted us to announce that the Dutch had dethroned their King.

"They will end up murdering one another," His Majesty remarked, to the astonishment of the diplomatic corps. "How dare they depose their sovereign?"

"We," snapped the Turkish ambassador with unusual imprudence, "depose our princes frequently."

Louis XIV, whose shifts of mood were irreverently scrutinized by the envoys of Europe's other monarchies, blinked and replied—his voice betraying his anger—that the Turks ought to hire his engineer Vauban to fortify the Dardanelles. His attendants and secretaries laughed in unison, as was to be expected.

Hours later Monsieur Colbert summoned me to his office.

"Le Duc!" he exclaimed. "My enemies accuse me of having condemned one of the finest physicians in Paris to the embassy in Istanbul!"

"I cannot complain about my stay in Turkey, Monsieur."

"How so? Would you not like to return to France?"

"It is preferable to be a duke in the East than a page in the West," I replied suavely.

"I could help expedite your noble title."

"Monsieur!"

Colbert rose and, approaching the window, crumbled a morsel of bread; several small birds fluttered around him.

"I fear that the provocation of that Turkish braggart will not go unanswered," he said as he returned to his desk.

"The ambassador is a member of the Köprülü family."

"How close?"

"A cousin of Nuuman Köprülü; both descend from Kara Mustafa."

"Ah, yes! The vizier who suffered the first Turkish defeat on Christian soil since the fall of Byzantium," Colbert concluded thoughtfully. "Yesterday's cowards beget tomorrow's heroes. Is it true that the vizier is mad?"

"Nothing serious; let us say, rather, a chronic hallucination. Nuuman Köprülü believes that a fly has chosen the tip of his nose as its dwelling."

"Only devout Muslims could have installed a lunatic as Vizier."

"The harem surgeon has prescribed certain herbs, but no physician has been able to convince him that the fly exists only in his imagination."

"Perhaps you can."

"Me?" I asked, bewildered.

Colbert settled back in his chair.

"This morning the English ambassador told me that our King was a timid intimidator. The Austrian emissary, for his part—and with his characteristic indiscretion—asked whether this was how the infidel Turks repaid our apostasy. Francis I's letters to the Sultan from his prison, as well as their secret pact, earned us the antipathy of both Catholic and Protestant states."

"Emperor Charles would not have approved of that remark," I replied.

"I am not so certain."

"In any case, it is thanks to Francis's captivity and to Charles's superstitious temperament that our nation controls the commercial exchanges between Turkey and the West."

"For how long?"

"Do you believe that such an insignificant dispute between our sovereign and the Turkish ambassador will damage our commercial relations?"

"England is attempting to establish a private commercial alliance with Russia."

"I see."

"His Majesty believes that the best way to avenge an offense is to forgive it," Colbert said with a satisfied smile. "Something he learned from the Jesuits. Tomorrow you will depart for Istanbul, Le Duc, with the purpose of curing the vizier and discrediting his ambassador in Paris."

I nodded, grateful and nervous.

"Few men have made France a nation," Monsieur Colbert added. "Be one of them, Le Duc."

II

Three weeks later the court of the chief eunuch received us at the quay of Gallipoli. The vizier—whom Monsieur Colbert had already informed of the reason for my return—had ordered that his finest guards escort me to the gates of the Seraglio Palace. His announcement unsettled me; since my interview with Monsieur Colbert, my efforts to find a remedy for the Vizier's affliction had kept me awake at night. An unnecessary surgery might be the most effective method, though certainly the least appropriate; Nuuman Köprülü could replace his nose with a golden one, as one of his Byzantine predecessors had done centuries earlier.

"The Vizier will be grateful to you," said the chief eunuch, adding with deliberate malice, "that is—if you manage to cure him of his delusion."

"Could we set sail immediately?" I asked evasively.

"If you fail," the chief eunuch snapped, "the Sultan and I will take offense."

I absorbed his disdainful words as a ship with broad white sails broke the horizon.

"Pirates," the eunuch hesitated, somewhat embarrassed. "I advise you to avoid strolling along the beach."

Hours later, upon disembarking at the Golden Horn, a pack of dogs followed us to the embassy. When Bazin, my chief assistant, tried to chase them away, the dogs howled in protest.

"It is best that you give them something to eat," the eunuch remarked. "They believe themselves to be the owners of Istanbul."

"Who allows this?" Bazin replied, shooing a dog with his handkerchief.

"One should argue neither with beasts nor with madmen," I pronounced.

"I have never heard that proverb," Bazin replied. "Is it of your own making?"

"Let us say it is," I hesitated, discovering in my words the answer to my arduous deliberations.

"Fetch me a fly," I told Bazin, "the greenest one you can catch."

III

At dusk the Vizier received us in his chambers with an opulent dinner.

"I shall know how to reward my surgeon," the Vizier whispered into my ear with an unsteady voice.

"His Majesty wishes you a swift recovery."

"Does he enjoy good health? I mean—your King."

"Not as much as his subjects would wish," I replied sadly. "He recently suffered a nervous episode."

"How so?"

"A certain conversation with your ambassador in Paris affected him. His Majesty fears that Your Excellency may cede our monopoly over the Silk Road to the English."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Vizier, grasping the purpose of my journey.

The dinner concluded, and the eunuch led us to another chamber, where a group of mystical dancers spun around us at a dizzying speed. The entertainments of singers and acrobats continued for two hours. Overcome by fatigue, and persuaded that the Vizier had lost interest in my treatment—at least for that night—I took my leave. Two guards led me through a labyrinth of paths to a garden on the northern wing of Topkapi.

"Could you apply your remedy now?" whispered the chief eunuch from behind a column, seized by an anxiety I had not perceived until then.

I nodded and asked him to lead me to the Vizier's antechamber. Shortly thereafter I discovered a man with dark circles under his eyes and a worn face, reclining on a bed of silk and satin. I confirmed that the Vizier I had met at dinner was, as I had suspected, an actor charged with representing the true Vizier at ceremonial functions.

Nuuman Köprülü then told me, his lips moist with sweat, that the fly was incubating its eggs in the pores of his nostrils. After engaging in some trivial conversation about the charms of Istanbul, I suddenly raised my knife and, asking the Vizier to remain calm, scratched the tip of his nose with a single stroke. The Turkish statesman recoiled and watched the drops of blood fall slowly onto the carpet of his chamber.

"Here it is," I said, showing him the plump green fly that Bazin had previously delivered to me, and which I had already partially severed.

"That's it!" exclaimed the Vizier, his eyes shining with triumph. "I knew it existed!"

Almost immediately the Vizier sank into a deep sleep, from which he would not awaken until the following dusk.

"The fly would not let him sleep," murmured the eunuch, tears in his eyes.

Having consolidated our position, and despite the insistence of the Turkish court, I returned to France—this time bearing the title of Count of Mont-Faucon.

The Bewitched King

The King of France, Louis XIV, is remembered by our boastful generations for his innovations in protocol and cuisine, which reinstated in Europe the pomp and excesses characteristic of the tyrannies of Rome, Turkey, Persia, and China. Neither the consolidation of absolute monarchy, nor the increase in taxes on the bourgeoisie, nor the impoverishment of the French peasantry, nor the unnecessary battles against Spain and England, nor the hordes of corpses that his descendants would emulate in the centuries to come have tarnished the reputation of the Sun King; even less so the establishment of absolute monarchy in his effort to condone the throat-slitting of a baby over a sacred chalice placed upon the belly of a prostitute.

I emphasize the phrases that shed light on this process in the chronicle that Nicolas de la Reynie, lieutenant general of the police of Paris, subscribed before the bishop of the city of Besançon days before his death:

"On September 21, 1677, an acolyte named Duvois discovered in the confessional of the Jesuits on Rue Saint-Antoine a handwritten sheet warning of the possible poisoning of the king and the dauphin. Over the course of ten weeks I compared its handwriting with the signatures that my predecessors had compiled from the most notorious criminals in Paris. After arduous efforts we managed to attribute the authorship of that note to Louis de Vanens, forger and alchemist by profession, whom we had already imprisoned and interrogated during the trial against Madame de Brinvilliers seven months earlier. On the eve of a new century, France has still not recovered from the condemnation of that noble lady, whose sinister beauty

nearly persuaded the jurors of her innocence in the poisonings of her father, her brothers, and her husband. Her burning at the stake not only moved our nation but alarmed the alchemists, who clandestinely supplied deadly potions to the most unscrupulous wives in our community. I concluded that Luis de Vanens's denunciation stemmed less from pious sentiment than from his fear of being implicated in a trial for lèse-majesté, which would bring him the triple punishment of quartering by horses, flaying alive, and the stake.

"—Madame de Montespan? —Captain Desgrez asked me.

—No —was my automatic reply.

Although almost all the recent poisoning convictions had fallen on the wives or lovers of the victims—except for a couple of parricides—it was illogical that the king's favorite concubine, mother of six of his bastards, would wish to murder her protector.

—She loves our sovereign with passion —I murmured after a brief pause.

Our courtiers still pitied the Marquis de Montespan, who had appeared at Versailles in mourning attire the day he learned that our king had abducted and impregnated his beloved wife. His downcast face had only earned him the royal seizure of his properties and the sarcasm of Molière, the court jester:

> To share a possession with Jupiter
> It is not dishonorable in any way.[5]

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[5]A partage with Jupiter
N'a rien du tout qui dishonor

Two months earlier the king had promulgated a law according to which the eldest of his bastards—that is, the firstborn of Madame de Montespan—could accede to the throne should his legitimate line die out. The favoritism toward the principal concubine had moreover been favored by the death of Louis XIV's adolescent lover, Mademoiselle de Fontanges, during her first childbirth.

—And the King still seems to love her —Desgrez noted.

That same afternoon the captain arrested Luis de Vanens and his lover, a fortune-teller and prostitute nicknamed Finette. The bones of a baby and several documents found in their house revealed to me the existence of a lodge of forgers, priests, and sorcerers devoted to the execution of human beings in profane masses. After interrogation, Vanens confessed that those bones were not of a baby, but of a fetus of Finette's. She, in turn, testified that together with Vanens she had appeared around two in the morning on a full-moon Friday in a rural chapel, where she allowed a renegade priest to lay her naked on the atrium of a church, tying her to four black candles, massaging her and giving her potions that soon forced her to abort. The baby was then throat-slit in what seemed a parody of the Holy Mass; its blood, poured into a chalice, was mixed with foul substances and ingested in the form of a host by a lady attired in an Italian silk dress, oriental ermine, and Spanish lace. The prostitute, who began to scream at the sight of her exsanguinated fetus, was prudently led out of the enclosure by an old woman whom Vanens referred to as La Vecina. Finette kept the bones as a relic of her consecration to darkness.

Another three-day interrogation yielded a less credible confession: the black mass described by Vanens had occurred not once, but hundreds of times over the last

twenty-four years. Despite our efforts, we could not extract the names of the implicated criminals. On the fourth day, however, the lawyer Perrin visited my office to inform me of a suspicious conversation he had overheard between the lame and one-eyed palm-reader Marie Bosse and several diners at the inn on Rue Courtauvilain. According to Perrin, Marie Bosse had boasted of having granted eternal peace to several members of the nobility, adding that two more marquises would suffice for her to live comfortably in Roussillon. After thanking and dismissing Perrin, I proceeded with Desgrez to shadow Marie Bosse; to that end my assistant urged the wife of one of his archers to visit the sorceress, assuming the bearing and attire of a marquise. In her first appointment the fortune-teller limited herself to reading the past and future of her client, who presented herself as the Marquise de Boucherat; in the second, after hearing the client's continual complaints against her miserly husband, Marie Bosse promised her a suitable remedy for their third meeting; our agent, who had already deciphered in that "suitability" a commercial euphemism, handed her pitonisa a substantial sum, and in her final audience the sorceress granted our assistant the proof we sought: a toxin capable of eluding the autopsies of Paris's most distinguished doctors. We proceeded to arrest Marie Bosse, who under threat of losing her only eye revealed to us the identity of La Vecina: Madame Catherine Deshayes, of whom La Fontaine would later write:

A lady in Paris made herself a Pythoness.

Her confirmation was accompanied by heartrending complaints in which the lame and one-eyed woman cursed herself for having betrayed one of the protégées of the prince of darkness. Her delirium would intensify in the

following days, to the point of inducing her to smash her head against the wall of her cell.

After Marie Bosse signed her confession, we proceeded to arrest Madame Deshayes, a drunken and lustful sorceress who, in a defiant tone, declared to us the next morning that she had given herself to the devil, who in the form of a bull had deflowered her at thirteen in a sabbath. Madame Deshayes was curiously the spouse of an upright man who endured her numerous adulteries with lovers as dissimilar as André Guillaume, executioner of Paris, and who, by a perverse twist of fate, would strangle her months later before the vulgar crowd of Paris. Monsieur Deshayes told us, in his loving devotion, that the instigator of his wife's actions was her principal lover, the prestidigitator Monsieur Adam Cœuret, alias Lesage, who on one occasion had persuaded La Vecina to poison her husband.

"But my Catherine," the outraged husband concluded, "repented when she saw my first death rattle; she was the one who saved me with antidotes."

Lesage, who was serving a two-year sentence in the Bastille for having deposited a copper bar in the National Bank under the pretense that it was a gold ingot, was immediately brought in for interrogation.

"You are accused of having instigated Madame Deshayes to poison her husband," Desgrez snapped at him.

"Ah!" Lesage laughed in a gesture of relief. "If that were true he would not be alive."

"…and of conspiring against His Majesty."

Lesage then fell to his knees, swearing his innocence.

"I only help desperate girls!" he sobbed at one point.

"How many abortions?" I interjected.

"Two or three thousand," the alchemist pondered; "you can dig up their remains in La Vecina's garden."

"Those fetuses," I murmured casually, "were they sacrificed in black masses?"

Lesage fell into a prolonged silence, from which he would only extract the king's promise to spare his life.

La Vecina, in an unexpected change of attitude, challenged us the next morning and proclaimed that if we wished to preserve our skins we must release her immediately.

"I have powerful protectors," she told us with blazing eyes, "capable of bringing about your fall."

Her assertions, and the sudden death of Marie Bosse, intimidated us to the point of inducing us to pray the rosary every day. It was then that the king, surely informed by his spies, summoned me to his apartments to inform me that he would support us unconditionally in our investigation. Not without vehemence I suggested to him that he establish a new Chambre Ardente with power to judge the numerous nobles who would be denounced by their arrested colleagues.

The Chambre Ardente uncovered the criminal ties of three hundred forty-six commoners, three ladies of the nobility, and one playwright; no noble was ultimately condemned, though it is whispered that each was subjected to some form of ostracism, and that the decline of Racine's genius was due to the king's disfavor.

The reason why the chamber was abruptly closed was not political, as the king's detractors claim, although I acknowledge that the measure strengthened his authority while weakening that of the clergy and the nobility. After His Majesty guaranteed life to the sorcerers who could implicate members of the nobility with reliable proof, Lesage demanded a pen, paper, and ink. Shortly the prestidigitator handed me a document so stinging that I myself had to go to Versailles in the midst of a snowstorm to deliver it to our

sovereign. Louis read its pages with a pale face, and after a long pause in which he seemed to gaze into emptiness, he rose and, throwing the sheets into the fire of a hearth, said to me:

"So the woman attired in Italian silk dress and Spanish lace is Madame de Montespan," our king cleared his throat. "I cannot punish her for having made me eat the blood of children."

"Nor for having poisoned other concubines."

The king restrained his tears with difficulty.

"We must close the Chambre Ardente," the expression of pain on his face persuaded me of his argument. "Only its members can do so, but who says so? The laws of the State? The State is I."

Despite my silence and my precautions, the rumor of Madame de Montespan's excesses reached the Chambre Ardente. Its effect could not have been more favorable; the king's will was solemnly obeyed and the chamber was dissolved in an afternoon. No one, not even our monarch, suspected at that time that the acquiescence of its members entailed a new constitutional value.

"Who was your greatest client?" I asked La Vecina minutes before her execution.

"Half of Paris," she replied; "they came to me in search of treasures, or to get rid of a relative. And all Lucifer demanded was the blood of an unwanted child!"

"Do you not repent?"

"An eternity in the flames of hell would not suffice to purge all my crimes," she said with a saddened air.

"Did you not predict your own misfortune?" I asked.

"I have powerful protectors," she insisted. "My sentence will be revoked at the last moment."

"By Madame de Montespan?"

"She is a most devout woman," La Vecina paled.

"In that we agree," I commented acidly; "Madame de Montespan will leave the court in a few days to spend her final years in the Carmelite convent."

La Vecina howled and tore her garments.

"If the king condemns me, his blood will run on the scaffold, and with it, that of all the French!"

"Superstitions," replied Minister Colbert when I related to him the last words of the most celebrated poisoner in France. "But you acted wrongly. The mother of the king's children deserves our respect."

"I myself have taken care to silence the source of such insults," I said, handing him the results of Lasage's autopsy.

"France will thank you, Monsieur."

The Bell of Emperor Yongle

According to the testimony of the Ecuadorian missionary Jacinto Carrasquilla, SJ, one of the finest bells ever cast by the peoples of the Far East hangs from the Tower of Wanningsi (Eternal Peace), which rises thirty-three meters above one end of the central arcade of the Sacred City of Beijing, north of Di'anmen Street. Historians of the Yellow Emperor attest that the Bell of Eternal Peace was cast at the beginning of the fifteenth century, during the reign of Emperor Yongle of the Ming dynasty. The natives of this land—writes Carrasquilla in his travel chronicles—attribute the perfection of its chime to the sacrifice of Chai Deng, daughter of the mandarin Deng Yong, who had been commissioned by the emperor's mother to cast the most harmonious bell on the continent, capable of awakening the virgins of the Winter Palace, located twenty kilometers from the imperial quarters. After several unsuccessful attempts, Deng Yong received an ultimatum from the Empress Dowager, warning him that if the metal of the bell failed once more, his head would roll down the steps of the Sacred City, to the delight of the eunuchs and as a treat for the emperor's Pekinese dogs.

"It is possible that tomorrow I will be executed," Deng Yong said to his wife and three daughters upon returning home. "The chief eunuch wishes to dispose of me in order to favor one of his relatives."

Deng Yong's words could not have caused deeper terror among his kin. His death was already a cause for grief, but even more so the certainty that, should he be executed, all the members of his household would accompany him to the grave. Deng's wife wailed and tore at her hair, while his

two younger daughters wept inconsolably at her feet. But Chai, his eldest daughter, maintained a phlegmatic countenance, though pale.

"I believe that this time I have unraveled the perfect combination," Deng Yong mused.

"May I speak, my father?" Chai asked, lowering her gaze.

"I must return now."

Chai understood that her father would leave them that night to spend it at his mistress's house.

"It must be less dense," Chai ventured to say before her father rose from the table. "It would suffice if you mixed it with one or two sacks of flour and two barrels of water."

"That is absurd," exclaimed Deng Yong, visibly irritated.

"Étienne told me so before departing."

Deng Yong's face contorted into a grimace of pain as his heavy, vigorous body advanced down the corridor.

"I do not wish to hear that buccaneer's name again," said Deng Yong before blinking slowly at Chai Deng's face.

"Prostitute!" shouted her mother before her father had left the room.

Chai expected an even greater reprisal from her mother and sisters, not without scratches, but the nearness of death had plunged them into a kind of lethargic resignation.

For the past three years Chai had maintained a sentimental liaison with Étienne Fourmont, who would later achieve fame in Europe for his *Linguae sinarum mandarinicae hieroglyphicae grammatica duplex* (Paris, 1742). Their relationship had been discreet, so that no one in Beijing had realized that the cause of Étienne's frequent visits to Deng Yong's residence was not merely diplomatic. Chai's own mother came to believe that Étienne was nothing more than

a fervent admirer of her husband, already celebrated in Japan and China for his writings on medicine, mathematics, and metallurgy—until, on one occasion, Pow, one of her younger daughters, caught Chai in Étienne's arms.

"You must have dreamed it!" was her mother's immediate reply to Pow. "Who would take an interest in a spinster like Chai? If there is a maiden in this house who might interest him, it would be Yi-Chang or you."

Chai herself did not understand it either; her elongated neck, her webbed feet, her broad hips, and her full breasts were a constant source of mockery among her relatives and acquaintances.

"To me you are the most beautiful woman of East and West," Étienne had whispered in her ear on many occasions.

Chai had instructed Étienne in the grammar of her language. Étienne, for his part, had instructed her in the fundamentals of European metallurgy—knowledge with which Chai hoped to win the favor of her father and of the emperor's mother.

"Is it true that you wish to marry Chai?" Deng Yong had asked Étienne in the midst of dinner.

"If the emperor permits it," was Étienne's laconic reply.

"You will marry Yi-Chang," Deng Yong responded. "Chai will spend her mature years with her parents."

Chai could not restrain a sob upon hearing her father's sentence.

"I have no interest whatsoever in marrying Yi-Chang," Étienne replied defiantly.

"In that case you leave me no other recourse than to speak with the emperor's mother. I am certain she will delight in learning how the Portuguese repay our hospitality."

"I am not Portuguese," Étienne replied.

"To me, all of you are."

Étienne fell into a deep silence, and Chai then understood that she would no longer be able to caress her lover's face in her father's house. Would she dare flee to France, as Étienne had proposed on several occasions? Impossible; if she fled, the emperor would claim her from the European kings.

Three days after that evening, when Chai had not yet recovered from her amorous frustration, an old woman approached her in the street to deliver a letter in which Étienne justified his sudden departure from Beijing. By then Chai had taken refuge in the passageways of her father's library, unable to acknowledge that Étienne had abandoned her—or, an even more onerous possibility, that he had never loved her.

That night, they say, Chai left her home in the company of a maidservant and a laborer, who led her to the workshops of Emperor Yongle. Upon entering, her father observed her with a convulsed expression, but such was his astonishment that neither he nor any of the workers handling the molten metal dared to question her about the reasons for her unexpected visit.

"The bell will be perfect," he murmured with tears in his eyes.

Taking advantage of the general confusion, Chai slipped off one of her slippers and, pushing off with her bare foot, hurled herself upon the molten metal, delivering her body to the fury of the flames.

The following day, the bell was presented to the emperor's mother, who, upon learning of the immolation of the mandarin Deng's daughter, would spread months later the rumor that Chai Deng had sacrificed herself to the deities of the night so that her father might cast the finest bell of

the empire. Such is the interpretation preserved by popular culture—far preferable to the details of an affair, a separation, a humiliation, and a suicide bordering on academic and amorous obstinacy.

On October fourth, 1924, at around seven in the evening, Carrasquilla had the opportunity to discern the harmonious tolling of Chai Deng's bell from the Palace of the Concubines, located twenty kilometers from the Sacred City.

The Linguistic Decree of Philip IV

It was the year 1625, only four years after Philip IV had ascended the throne of Spain. At twenty years old, the young monarch was already known for his elegance, his love of the arts, and a small but notable speech impediment inherited from his family. Whenever he pronounced a word with a "C" or "Z," a peculiar sibilant sound emerged, similar to the English "th."

Though his closest courtiers assured him it was an endearing trait, the court—always on the lookout for weaknesses—turned it into thinly veiled mockery.

One October afternoon, in one of the vast salons of the Alcázar of Madrid, Philip overheard two young nobles imitating his speech. They were sons of important families: the Marquis of Villanueva and the Count of Benavente, both recently arrived from their estates in Extremadura. The stifled laughter struck him like a dagger. He knew a monarch must inspire respect, and any sign of weakness—even one as trivial as his way of speaking—could be used against him.

That night Philip could not sleep. He rose several times, paced the dark corridors of the palace, paused before the portraits of his ancestors. In Charles V's face he thought he saw reproach; in Philip II's, a warning. "What would they think of a king who cannot even pronounce the name of his own capital correctly?" he asked himself bitterly.

The next morning he summoned the Count-Duke of Olivares.

Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares, was a robust man with a piercing gaze. He had served the crown since Philip was a child and knew the twists of power better than anyone. When he entered the king's private chamber,

he found His Majesty pale, with dark circles under his eyes, staring out the window toward the gardens where the first autumn leaves were already falling.

"Your Majesty," Olivares said with a bow, "I have been told you have not taken a bite all day."

Philip turned slowly.

"Olivares, I must ask you a question, and I want you to answer me frankly, even if the truth is painful. Do they mock me at court? Do they laugh at the way I speak?"

The count-duke lowered his gaze for an instant. He was a practical man who had learned that truth, administered with prudence, could be more useful than lies.

"Your Majesty," he replied at last, "there are those who, in their ignorance, fail to understand that the peculiarities of a king are, by nature, superior to those of ordinary mortals. What in another would be a defect, in Your Majesty is distinction."

"Do not speak to me in riddles, Olivares. I have heard the laughter. I heard it clearly."

"It is true that some fools…" the count-duke chose his words carefully, "…have commented on Your Majesty's particular pronunciation. But allow me to say something you may not have considered: a king need not adapt to his subjects. It is they who must be molded according to the royal will."

Philip looked at him curiously.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Your Majesty, that if your way of pronouncing words has become a subject of comment, turn it into law. Make the entire kingdom speak as you do. Thus what today is mockery will tomorrow be standard, and what today is weakness will become the distinctive mark of the Spanish Empire."

The king remained silent for a long time. Outside, a crow cawed among the trees.

"Do you believe that is possible?"

"Your Majesty," Olivares said with a barely perceptible smile, "you are King of Spain, Naples, Sicily, and the Indies. Your empire is one on which the sun never sets. If a king such as you cannot determine how speech should be conducted in his own domains, what kind of king would he be?"

The idea took root in Philip like a seed in fertile soil. Over the following days he consulted theologians and grammarians of the court. Don Baltasar de Zúñiga, an elderly counselor from his father's time, warned him against the measure.

"Your Majesty," the old noble said in a trembling voice, "language is like a river: it can be diverted, but not stopped. The people speak as their parents taught them, as their grandparents spoke. A royal decree can change laws, taxes, borders… but language lives in the mouth of the people, not on the parchment of palaces."

But Philip had already made up his mind. On November 3, 1625, in a solemn ceremony in the Hall of Realms, he signed the edict. The royal secretary read it aloud before a bewildered court:

"By decree of His Majesty Philip IV, King of Spain and the Indies, Defender of the Faith, it is established that the pronunciation of the 'C' before 'e' and 'i,' as well as the 'Z' in all positions, shall from this day forward be uniform throughout the empire: they shall be articulated with the tongue between the teeth, like the gentle breeze that crosses the fields of Castile, symbol of distinction and unity in our language. Whoever resists this pronunciation in official documents, public sermons, or in the presence of royal

authorities shall be considered a rebel against the Majesty of the King Our Lord."

The edict was proclaimed in the plazas of Madrid, Toledo, and Valladolid. The heralds, aware of the importance of the moment, exaggerated every "ce" and every "zeta" as though their lives depended on it. In Madrid the citizens listened with a mixture of confusion and resignation. Some shrugged; others exchanged incredulous glances.

In the north, where interdental pronunciation was already common, the decree was received with indifference. "Why do we need a decree ordering us to do what we already do?" people asked in Burgos and León.

But in Seville the reaction was different.

Don Rodrigo Pacheco, a fifty-year-old olive oil merchant who had made his fortune supplying the Indies fleets, was in Plaza de San Francisco when the herald read the edict. He was a practical man, with thick hands and a face weathered by the sun. He listened in silence, and when the herald finished, he spat on the ground.

"To change the way we speak because of the whim of a king who has never set foot in Andalusia?" he muttered to his neighbor. "My father spoke like this, and my grandfather too. What does that Madrid boy know about how they speak in Seville?"

His neighbor, a master shoemaker named Juan de Morales, nodded.

"Language belongs to the people, Don Rodrigo, not to the throne. Let the king issue whatever orders he likes in his palace. Here we'll keep speaking the way God taught us."

In the Americas the edict arrived months later, brought by the galleons that crossed the Atlantic. In Lima the viceroy read it with a condescending smile and filed it away in a drawer. In Mexico, Havana, Buenos Aires, the

news was met with that cheerful fatalism with which colonial subjects receive absurd orders from the metropolis: they obey in appearance, but do not comply.

Don Alonso de Cárdenas, a royal official in Mexico City, a scrupulous and God-fearing man, tried to enforce the decree in his office. For a week he forced his clerks to pronounce words according to the new rule. But he soon realized that documents took twice as long to draft, that witnesses looked at the officials with mockery, that the whole process became ridiculous.

"It's useless," he confessed to his wife one night. "You can order a man to pay taxes, to kneel before the cross, to march to war… but you cannot order him to change the way he has spoken since birth."

Meanwhile in Madrid, Philip IV watched with growing frustration as his decree was applied only in the circles closest to power. The courtiers, of course, immediately adopted the interdental pronunciation, even exaggerating it when speaking to the king. But Philip was not foolish; he could distinguish flattery from genuine obedience.

One spring afternoon the following year, while walking in the gardens of the Buen Retiro, he overheard two gardeners talking. They spoke in thick Andalusian seseo. One of them was telling a joke about a noble who pronounced words "as if he had a beehive in his mouth."

Philip stopped behind a hedge, hidden. The gardeners continued talking, unaware of his presence. And the king understood, in that moment of painful clarity, that he had been a fool.

That night he dined with Olivares.

"Count-Duke," he said, "my decree has failed."

Olivares, who was savoring a glass of Jerez wine, raised an eyebrow.

"Failed, Your Majesty? Not at all. In the court, in the chanceries, in the universities, everyone speaks as Your Majesty does. The decree is a success."

"Do not lie to me, Olivares. The people still speak as they always have. In Seville they mock us. In the Indies they have not even heard of it. I tried to change something that cannot be changed."

The count-duke set the glass on the table.

"Your Majesty, a king does not fail. He simply… sows seeds that others will reap. You may not see the fruit in your lifetime, but in a hundred years, in two hundred, the entire empire will speak as you do. History is patient."

But Philip knew it was not true. He had learned, in the most humiliating way possible, that a king's power has limits. He can conquer territories, build palaces, win wars… but he cannot enter the mouths of his subjects and shape their language.

The years passed. The decree was never officially repealed, but neither was it enforced. Royal chroniclers, under discreet instructions from Philip himself, ceased to mention it. When the king died in 1665 after forty-four years of reign, the document was quietly removed from the official archives. No one spoke of it again.

Yet something curious had occurred. In the northern regions of Spain, where interdental pronunciation was already common, the presence of the court and royal institutions consolidated it. Officials, teachers, priests—all those who wished to rise socially—adopted that way of speaking as a mark of refinement. Not because of a royal decree, but through imitation, vanity, the human desire to appear superior to others.

In Andalusia, the Canary Islands, and the vast lands of America, however, seseo persisted with the stubbornness of things that are true. Peasants, merchants, soldiers,

mothers teaching their children to speak—all kept the pronunciation inherited from their ancestors.

Thus, without anyone planning it, Spain and its former colonies were divided not by mountains or oceans, but by a sound: that small interdental "th" that in some places meant culture and in others affectation.

Don Rodrigo Pacheco, the Seville olive oil merchant, died in 1653 at seventy-eight years of age. On his deathbed, surrounded by children and grandchildren, he spoke his final words with the Andalusian seseo he had defended all his life:

"Live as free men," he told them. "And speak as your mothers taught you, not as kings command you."

His descendants kept that way of speaking. Some emigrated to America, carrying with them that soft sound of "ces" and "zetas." Others remained in Seville, and their great-grandchildren, centuries later, still seseaban with the same pride as Don Rodrigo.

The Linguistic Decree of Philip IV faded into history the way absurd orders of the powerful fade: without fanfare, without drama, simply ceasing to exist. But it left a trace, a small vestige of royal vanity that tried to uniform what is by nature diverse.

And perhaps the deepest irony of the decree lies in this: by attempting to impose unity, Philip IV unwittingly eternalized division. He wanted the entire empire to speak like him, and without intending it, he created two sound worlds that would never fully meet.

Because language, like life itself, is stubborn and elusive. It can be influenced, guided, perhaps even seduced… but never fully subdued. It lives in the mouth of the people, not in the edicts of kings. And no decree, however solemn, can change that simple and terrible truth.

Nietzsche's last battle

Nietzsche was sitting in his room in the psychiatric sanatorium in Basel. It was a cold winter night, and the fire in the fireplace crackled softly. He was reading a worn copy of Shakespeare's "King Lear."

Nietzsche had devoured the work in his early adolescence, but this time he went through it slowly due to his second stroke. "You have to chew what you read," he would leave written for posterity. The story of Lear, an elderly king who divides his kingdom among his daughters, moved him because of its similarity to his German people, who rewarded with lucrative university professorships the philosophies of teachers who flattered their nationalism, while rejecting his own. free thinker critical of the nascent nationalism and anti-Semitism that would eventually lead his nation to chaos.

Nietzsche identified with Cordelia. They were both honest and sincere, betrayed by their loved ones. Both banished, alone and desperate. At least Cordelia had a devout husband, she thought, but didn't he have her mother, that devout Christian she had hurt so much with her diatribes?

Nietzsche had been a great friend of Wagner, whom he had honored with his thesis "The Birth of Tragedy", as the authentic artist who gave Germany the Apollonian-Dionysian pulsation that the Greeks enjoyed with Aeschylus and Sophocles. But a secret passion had separated them. He read again and remembered the smile of the Valkyrie married to her revered composer.

Cosima had been his secret passion for many years. Nietzsche had suffered greatly from their separation, but

even more from the fact that he had never confessed his love for her. He often dreamed that Cosima led him to the majestic hall where warriors killed in battle were honored, Valhalla.

Nietzsche also remembered the doctors who prescribed his madness. He suffered from episodes of vehement sincerity that others considered psychotic; His acquaintances avoided him more frequently since he announced the publication of "The Antichrist."

He felt that it was Cordelia who was dreaming of him, an honest and sincere youngest daughter who infuriated her father by telling the truth: "I love you as a daughter should love a father." What great truths were contained in such a laconic phrase! What a contrast to the shower of metaphors and adjectives of her sisters! Now he walked with her, facing his French army through the marshy fields of Northern England.

Nietzsche told her that he understood her, and that she was a brave woman. The battle against the hosts of Gorenila and Regan began and Cordelia replied that not only was he brave, but also honest.

Nietzsche drew his sword forged in truth and fought against the Kaiser, against Wagner, against the Hegelians and Kantians, against the scholastics of France and England, against the Pope and the priests who would persecute his readers, shouting the truths to each one. that they had not wanted to hear.

Mortally wounded, Nietzsche and Cordelia embraced each other: "We, who are so young, will not see so much, nor live so long." Only then did he understand that he was dying not in the arms of King Lear, but of the Valkyrie of his dreams.

The Vision of Tsar Nicholas

Both historians and biographers agree that Tsar Nicholas was initially reluctant to heed the advice of the monk Rasputin; the sudden cure of his hemophiliac son would lead to an abnegation that sacrificed one million seven hundred forty-seven thousand two hundred fifty-one young Russians to the Teutonic cannons. A motivation no less superstitious for such a sacrifice can be found in the tedious *Mémoires* of Countess Fiedka Jaruzelski (1843–1921), who on page one hundred eight of her second volume recounts an anecdote that reveals not only the Tsar's desidia, but also his parsimony during the October Revolution. I omit below the countess's burdensome elucubrations:

"...Although it was already nearly two in the morning, the atmosphere remained apprehensive.

"All despots will suffer like slaughtered pigs," Rasputin said then before the mirror, "until the last of their victims attains happiness."

"I am not a despot," the Tsar muttered sarcastically, "and if I were, your prophecies would not concern me. Like most rulers of this hypocritical and selfish world, I have chosen to be agnostic."

"Agnostic?" the Tsarina interjected; "the term refers to ignorance."

"Do you not believe in God?" Rasputin asked.

"If I believed, I would already have destroyed myself, as has happened to so many saints and martyrs," the Tsar scoffed. "But neither am I anti-religious. Religions subsist as the consolation of the poor, just as Schopenhauer prescribes. Even reasoning according to the concepts of good and evil so loudly preached by the patriarchs, there are

atheists who fare better than most Christians. Think of Robespierre. How did he obtain power? By making his homeland, if not his church, a religion."

"Robespierre, however," I interjected, "ended by losing his head."

"After ruling France at his whim?" the Tsar muttered.

"There are exceptional men who strive for their homeland," Rasputin replied, "but for their religion. Ah! Who would not die for their religion? It was for it that a people of leprous slaves fled Egypt and conquered Canaan; it was for it that the English established the equality of men before the King; it was for it that human rights eventually prevailed over the rituals of the Church of Rome; it was for it that a group of religious dissidents emigrated to America and founded the Union; it was for it that Russia has endured a progeny of tyrants."

"Is that a premonition?"

"A revelation," Rasputin corrected him; "so chilling that those who behold it risk losing themselves in the labyrinths of the mind. We are molds of clay, and we can scarcely endure the radiance of the sun."

The Tsar, who had already heard rumors that Rasputin was capable of sharing visions from beyond the grave, expressed his curiosity about the condition of the dead. The monk, visibly irritated by the Tsar's skepticism, warned us that although Providence allowed him to contemplate certain states of suffering, the revelation of any arcana would disrupt not only our lives but those of our descendants. Nicholas, who had already consumed an imprudent quantity of champagne, then shouted that unless Rasputin complied with his demands, he himself would deport him to the deserts of Uzbekistan. The Tsarina intervened, as was customary, to persuade the monk to

organize one of his transmundane gatherings. Rasputin, who in his sagacity never contradicted his benefactress (or his lover, as malicious tongues murmured), narrowed his eyes and, raising his arms toward the firmament, proclaimed that the fate of Russia was already sealed. Almost immediately, the Tsarina ordered her maids to lead us to the small chapel of the palace.

As we crossed the garden, Rasputin asked the Tsar the name of the deceased whose life troubled him.

"Deceased?"

"The man you admire most."

"Ivan the Terrible," the Tsar exclaimed with a hint of enthusiasm.

Rasputin muttered several unintelligible words between his teeth. Upon entering the chapel, the monk invited us to form a semicircle around the altar. The Tsar then joked jovially about the torments his ancestors might be enduring in Hades. Rasputin, maintaining his stern demeanor, asked us to interlace our hands and, after a brief pause, instructed us to meditate on the Last Judgment. From the silence we heard him intone a lulling litany.

I do not recall how long we remained thus—between one hour and an hour and a half—until we became aware of a dim glow emerging around us. I opened my eyes and, horrified, realized that no other muscle obeyed my will; my hands and legs remained motionless, like the limbs of a corpse. My apprehension grew as I beheld the livid faces of my companions. It was evident that we were witnessing a vision in an unreal space, yet one still tethered to reality; I now dare to compare it to the cinematographic projections so fashionable in our time, except that what we beheld was not illusory, but real—too real.

Before us stood a man in a white toga, about twenty-two years old, dictating a document to a scribe seated at a

desk. His confident, arrogant expression briefly persuaded us of his importance as a statesman or ruler, but we soon perceived that his body concealed an abominable being, from whose chest emerged a fanged appendage resembling a venomous serpent. Our first vision had been—now we understood—only the reflection of this image. Several mirrors shattered, and a new image took our breath away—irrefutable proof that, in some manner, we remained within them. Chained to the wall of a dimly lit coal mine, the same creature groaned intermittently; red-hot embers glowed in the sockets of his eyes. His gaunt face transmitted a despairing suffering. Then we detected a penetrating, nauseating odor, akin to that of latrines on the battlefield. A terror—known only to those who have suffered vertigo or claustrophobia—coursed through our interlaced limbs; one way or another, we understood that this wretch was Tsar Ivan.

"His most miserable victim," Rasputin added, "is the body Ivan is condemned to inhabit."

We painfully regained our composure; I shall never forget the Tsarina's slack jaw, dripping saliva, nor the erect hair and bulging pupils of our sovereign.

"And he does not know he is dead!" the Tsar shrieked hysterically. "And he does not know he is dead!"

"Those who do not know they are eternal," Rasputin sobbed, "are condemned to relive the sufferings they themselves forged."

Unable to conceal our horror, we hastened back to the main salon, where each of us, for no apparent reason, avoided the mirrors lining the walls.

The following day, the Tsar—who from then on would refer to death as a pleasurable state—declared war on his cousin in Germany."

The Astrologer

The lack of interest in foreign languages in our schools has allowed me to acquire, at a modest price, a considerable number of books originally published in France, Italy, and Germany, in the antiquarian bookshops of England. This pastime, like any other, is not without its responsibilities. At the beginning of the year 2000 I found a handwritten sheet in German among the frayed pages of Karl Scheffler's *Gesammelte Essays* (Insel-Verlag: Leipzig, 1912). Its meaning eluded me for several years, until, during an occasional trip to Saint Petersburg, I met a decrepit, toothless Russian woman doctor—such was the condition to which the Cold War had reduced its professionals—who survived by selling trinkets in Pushkin Square. Upon learning of my interest in history, the old woman offered me a collection of documents in several languages which, according to her, had once been part of the KGB archives. How great was my surprise when I recognized among them the very same handwriting as that of the manuscript discovered in York!

I publish below my translation of both documents:

Manuscript discovered in the year 2000

Since my affiliation with the Party I have cultivated astrology; like so many compatriots, I have reviled the Hebrew religion of my most recent ancestors in order to replace it with the native rites of my Proto-Indo-European great-grandparents. Our conversion has been painfully effective; since the triumph of our Leader we have entrusted our fears and aspirations to a being of flesh and blood, far more concrete than that imprecise entity whom the common

people call God. Like the emulators of Paracelsus and the disciples of Buddha, I conceive of the universe as an instinctive organism, akin to beasts and trees. The motor of nature, as Schopenhauer glimpsed it, is not rational but instinctive. Only the superior man—that is, the man who possesses both reason and an iron will—will be able to manipulate nature and his destiny. The will, as our Leader has demonstrated so well, excludes neither murder nor lies. Any creed that professes compassion or affection reduces man to that passive state which our official philosopher calls slavery.

My art, as is well known, is based on the study of planetary movements. I am capable of seasoning a fortune, a love affair, or a global empire in accordance with the fluctuations of a natal chart. On the basis of our studies, I have announced that the bold maneuvers of our Leader will make our nation one of the most prosperous on the globe. I have also suppressed the verdict that within four years each of our Leader's aides will face a series of terrorist attacks; the coordinates of our capital will then lie at the most antagonistic point of Mars, Uranus, Pluto, and Saturn, heralds of destruction. My astrological and numerological knowledge compels me, according to my date of birth, to renounce my family, my power, and my fortune five days before the coming Ides of May. My sacrifice will ensure me a long life. Under the influence of the planet of war I shall land unharmed on a plain predetermined by the Moon in Capricorn, under my Cancer ascendant; a slight tremor seizes me when I realize that this plain is part of enemy territory; my audacity, nonetheless, will be rewarded with a tranquil life as a celebrated commander of the most powerful army on Earth.

I fear that my compatriots will curse me as soon as they learn of my movements. I myself have left a note for

my Leader in which I suggest that he label me mad; my subordinates will duly attest that the man who governed them for several years had already gone insane some time ago. Coolly I ascertain that few among them will survive the baleful influences of Mars and Bellona; those who do will ultimately praise my wisdom.

When I recover my privileges I shall give an account to my friends and enemies of the reasons for my escape: patiently I shall demonstrate to them that only superior men are capable of mastering the circumstances of destiny, outwitting death, acting against the conventions of constitutions and gods. My revelations will necessarily be esoteric. The occult sciences have never been hidden because of their supposed vagueness, but because of their privileged potential.

Only a circle of the chosen, the elite of the world, will have access to my writings. "My chauffeur is waiting for me; it is time to take my leave, concealing my agitation before my children and my wife."

Manuscript discovered in Saint Petersburg

I shudder to confirm that each of my predictions has been fulfilled; unharmed I descended upon the meadows of Scotland on May 10, 1941. Reviled by Adolf Hitler, tried and humiliated by my enemies, I have lived quietly—far too quietly—for forty-two years in this fortress of Berlin, weaving the destiny of hundreds of English, Russian, French, and American soldiers. My country has likewise become the third most powerful nation in the world; its influence over the European Union, and through it over the world, exalts me.

And yet I have endured an undeserved existence. Recklessly I foretold my destiny through astrology, without realizing that those who challenge the creative forces of the

universe suffer the most dire consequences. As an influential member of the Nazi Party I condemned millions of mestizos; at ninety-three years of age I realize that, without knowing it, I granted each of them a happy immortality; vainly I have longed for it since 1941.

My struggle against suicide has been constant; while my fellow party members took their own lives upon learning of their defeat, I have chosen a prolonged life, perhaps in the hope that my misfortunes might atone for my offenses.

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

My errors have persuaded me that, as mortal beings, we shall never unravel the laws of chance and existence. A certain suprasensible will seems to orchestrate the movements of history, a certain passive will akin to that of the Jewish Messiah whom I once renounced. Night falls; from the bowels of this inhuman mass, I, Rudolf Hess, secretly recall my excesses.

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere me.

The Progeny of the Mongols

The Mare's Nest, by David Irving, endures as a chilling account of the bombardment of London carried out by the Germans between 1944 and 1945 using remotely guided and jet-propelled weapons. On its final page, Irving attributes Germany's defeat to the tenacity with which the Führer, his executors, his scientists, his vassals, and his forced laborers pursued the development of weapons such as the A-4:

"Germany preferred the spectacular to the strategic; rockets to radar, and it was this that lost her the war."

Like so many other historians, Irving analyzes events from the vantage point of their consequences, assuming that the destructive failure of the rocket conclusively demonstrates the folly of those who once deemed it viable. His reasoning overlooks, moreover, a short essay by Kierkegaard on the opportune moment, which maintains that no man, society, or nation is capable of carrying out an enterprise without the concurrence of a series of contingencies beyond its will. Those circumstances—plausibly of divine origin in Kierkegaard, implausibly of economic origin in Marx—proved adverse to the proper functioning of the A-4 rocket, as well as to the triumph of the Führer and of the Emperor of the Rising Sun. After the invasion of Normandy, and while British intelligence strove to deny the certainty of A-4 production under the assumption that the Germans were incapable of manufacturing such sophisticated weapons, hundreds of European factories were bombed for reasons unrelated to the German secret-weapons program.

The animosity of Divinity toward the Nazis finds several precedents: in the nineteenth century, near Waterloo,

a storm forced Napoleon to delay the movements of his troops by a day; in the sixteenth century, the Armada of Philip II foundered because of a gale off the coast of England.

The persistent rise of tyrants over the past thousand years traces back to the *Monǧolun Niuča Tobčaan—The Secret History of the Mongols*—a text in which a visionary promises Genghis Khan a progeny capable of enslaving the world. Genghis, who preferred the frenzy of concupiscence to the calm of abstinence, inferred that his sons and grandsons would wear the crowns his hordes had wrested from the despots of Asia, Africa, and Europe.

After the fall of the Mongol Empire and the death of Genghis's legitimate descendants, this prophecy fell into oblivion, until seven centuries later a group of genetic engineers asserted, on the basis of a comparative study of the Y chromosome, that one out of every two hundred men in Asia and Europe descended from Genghis Khan. Their hypothesis—which may be corrected by less credulous generations—rests on the historical certainty of the rape of the maidens of every village devastated by the progeny of Genghis.

The doctrine of aristocratic insemination had, in fact, already been practiced with the complicity of the subjugated races by the sons of Attila, another Mongol warrior no less conspicuous than Genghis, from the steppes of Central Asia to the valleys of the Rhine and the Elbe. Proof of this lies in the dark hair and round faces of a third of the inhabitants of Austria and Germany.

Recent genetic studies, read in the light of this prophecy, point to the dominant presence of the bellicose chromosomes of Attila and Genghis Khan; and those who travel along the Silk Road may see, at their sides, the

sorrowful faces—golden-hued, dark-eyed—of Napoleon Bonaparte and Francisco Franco.

We know that history ultimately imposes itself upon its protagonists. Genghis died without conceiving either that his empire would collapse after two generations or that his lineage would be merely biological. Centuries later Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler, whose physiognomies were as Asian as they were Nordic, set out—before a crowd blinded not only racially—to repopulate European soil with inhabitants from cold and barren lands that neither Attila nor Genghis had cared to conquer. To that end, both proclaimed the superiority of a race that had been indeterminate or reduced to slavery by Greeks and Romans; to that end, both groomed it according to the preferences Hollywood imposed in the early 1920s, privileging blondes over the redheads praised by Tacitus; to that end, both appealed to the prejudices of their generation in their zeal to purge European soil of its inhabitants with black hair and aquiline noses; and to that end, finally, both brought about their own downfall, exterminating those who, like themselves, descended directly from a maiden raped by the soldiers of the hordes of Attila or Genghis Khan.

Why the British Empire's Army Was Saved at Dunkirk

The Darkest Hour, is a striking film for Latin Americans not only because of its quality and Gary Oldman's performance—he, like so many character actors, mimics Winston Churchill's voice, manners, and gestures—but above all because of the dilemma its director, Joe Wright, presents: war or peace? fight or submission? death or slavery?

The film pits two stances against each other: the pacifist one, embodied by the outgoing British prime minister Neville Chamberlain, and the belligerent one, embodied by Churchill. Let us recall that Neville Chamberlain was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, just like Hitler and Stalin. What initially appears as a debate over peace turns into a battle for the survival of democracy and the most fundamental individual rights, such as private property and self-determination. Chamberlain's pacifism gradually becomes cowardice—if not outright complacency with tyranny—while Churchill's warlike stance takes shape as freedom and courage.

At this moment, Colombia faces an unprecedented crisis. The honest citizen finds himself besieged after disputed presidential elections that brought Gustavo Petro to power—a president denounced for his ties to drug traffickers, armed groups, and world-class smugglers, as well as for his declared sympathies with Hamas and with dictatorships such as Maduro's.

Colombia's tradition as the most consistent democracy in Latin America is now under threat. Petro is attempting to dismantle Congress and the high courts in

order to become a dictator through a Constituent Assembly, 40 percent of whose members he himself would appoint. Socialist commandos—imported directly from Venezuela and Cuba, though not yet approaching the numbers of the masses that set Europe ablaze in the 1940s or consumed Russia throughout the twentieth century—are operating on our soil.

With the support of 16 percent of the population—artificially inflated in polls to 30 percent by armed groups' control over large swathes of Colombian territory—it becomes inevitable to compare Petro to Clark Olofsson, the kidnapper associated with the origin of the so-called Stockholm syndrome. His warm populist promises—such as refusing to punish cellphone thieves who terrorize our cities with knives and revolvers—seduce certain vulnerable sectors. Meanwhile, his excessive levels of state contracting favor loyalists whose sole function is to collect a monthly salary in exchange for militating for his party.

In this context, *The Darkest Hour* presents itself as a faithful mirror of our reality. The fundamental question then arises: to what extent should we accept peace proposals with bandits when our most basic freedoms—such as democratic voting and freedom of the press—are under threat?

Hitler, as Neville Chamberlain puts it, possesses the most powerful army the world has ever seen and is on the verge of destroying the British army on the beaches of Dunkirk.

"Only a miracle," Churchill says, "can prevent 350,000 British soldiers and 100,000 French troops from being destroyed by the Luftwaffe and the infantry of the Third Reich."

Churchill places his trust in that miracle, in sharp opposition to Chamberlain's stance, and refuses to sign a

peace treaty with Mussolini, whom he calls "the lackey" of Adolf Hitler.

"One cannot reason with a tiger when one's head is already between its jaws!" Churchill retorts in one of the film's most intense scenes.

No recent film has better reflected the feelings of those of us who have seen Colombian democracy wobble in the name of peace since November 22, 2016, when the current government ignored the will of the majority, which voted NO to the Havana accords.

The miracle Churchill hopes for does occur, and almost all British soldiers are transported back to the shores of England.

The evacuation of Dunkirk is the subject of another recent film. Yet neither that film nor Europe's most perceptive historians have fully deciphered the reasons why Hitler did not destroy the bulk of the British army. Did he expect Churchill to surrender? Did he experience a moment of weakness?

The answer was revealed to me during one of my wanderings through France. It lay, I was told, in the Teutonic character itself—disciplined, yes, but also macho and quarrelsome.

I spent the summer of 2000 in France, when I visited a small village in the Franche-Comté. There, Ulises Jannin, an elderly farmer and hunter, revealed to me that he and his fellow villagers were the reason the British army had survived.

"It was we who saved the British Empire," he told me proudly. "The Germans were advancing through Belgium and crossing the Maginot Line. We knew the French and British armies were cornered in Dunkirk and needed time. We were told, again and again, that we had to

delay the German advance at all costs. So I convinced my friends that we should open the doors of our cellars."

"Your wines?"

"Of course—but above all, the champagne. Thousands of cellars were uncovered in fields, meadows, and caves, all placed at the disposal of Hitler's glorious army. The drunkenness was epic and lasted an entire week. They had never drunk champagne before; in Germany at the time it was a luxury reserved for their superiors. And imagine what happened when the wealthier French opened their cellars filled with thousands of bottles of cognac. The soldiers drank it hastily, before it could fall into the hands of their rulers."

Hitler and his officers were furious. But remember, we are cousins of the Germans, and we know their fondness for drink. You cannot bribe a German—but offer him a drink, then another, get him drunk, and he will reveal his humanity. Champagne made the Germans lose their heads. We lost thousands of francs, but thanks to that we saved the British Empire. Bottles from that bacchanal are still buried in the fields, fifty years later.

"A stratagem worthy of the Greek Ulysses," I nodded. "How is it that history has never recorded it?"

"Out of decency," he laughed, raising his wine glass. "Those bacchanals were accompanied by several skirt scandals. But you have never lived through war, and you do not understand that what is scandalous in peacetime is trivial when compared to the rifle."

Ulises never drank water, and when I asked him why, he replied that water rusts.

"Neither the Germans, nor the French, nor the British know that this was my small contribution to freedom," he continued. "The Nazi soldiers thus suffered an outbreak of indiscipline in their most glorious campaign," he

concluded, as he poured me another glass of wine. "But now you know—and you must not speak of it, at least while I am alive."

"Why?" I asked, facing the angry expression of Colette, his wife, who gestured that I should not believe a single word he said.

"The German press might find out," he whispered in his rustic dialect, his eyes full of fear, "and come to interrogate me about matters I would rather not discuss."

I nodded, recalling a chronicle of young people executed by the German army in the Franche-Comté.

We all carry crosses we prefer not to speak of.

Marilyn Monroe, Queen of Babylon

She dreamed as a child that she was naked in a church (as The Times recounts),
before a prostrate multitude, their heads pressed to the ground,
and that she had to walk on tiptoe so as not to step on their heads.

Ernesto Cardenal

My name is Amadeus Miranda. In 1991, I left my native Colombia to study Political Science at Temple University in Philadelphia. It was there that I found myself immersed in an intriguing discovery concerning the iconic actress of the twentieth century, Marilyn Monroe.

Everything began during the bitter winter of 1995, when my life took an abrupt turn. I fell deeply in love with Martha, my neighbor, an audacious feminist and author of the controversial book *Between Witches and Bitches, Trapped in a Man's World* (Haggards, New York, 1993).

Martha had striking gray eyes and long blond hair. Her figure was slender, with small breasts and curving hips, which she habitually concealed beneath masculine attire; she was the kind of woman who demanded recognition for her intellect before her physical appeal.

At that time, I was thirty-five years old, and my shyness had allowed me little more than a smile whenever we crossed paths on the way to the laundry room or when I took my trash bags to the communal container. I was therefore quite surprised when she invited me out on a date for Valentine's Day.

We made love until dawn, then drank a bottle of wine and smoked a carton of cigarettes. We continued seeing

each other for several weeks, until we decided to live together. Like all lovers, we shared our spaces and belongings. What caught my attention was realizing that, despite earning her living as a writer, Martha was rarely at home. Every weekday morning she left for work—so she told me—at the offices of her publishing house, just a few meters from Penn Station, on Locus Street. She carried a heavy, hermetically sealed briefcase of leather and metal, a Louis Vuitton, which she always kept locked. Out of mere curiosity, I looked up its price in a sales catalogue and confirmed that it cost as much as a compact car.

One Friday, while Martha was taking a shower and I was drafting a paper for my course on Direct Cinema documentary theory, I noticed her briefcase open on the sofa. I approached discreetly and discovered, without much surprise, two pistols, a grenade, and what appeared to be telecommunications equipment. I returned to my work without Martha noticing my discovery.

After a year of romance, I showered Martha on our second Valentine's Day with a bouquet of forty-eight red roses and thirty-six white carnations. It was Wednesday, and Martha, visibly moved, took Thursday and Friday off so that we could travel to her parents' cabin in the mountains of Vermont. The waves of heat emanating from the radiators in the rooms of that bungalow were comforting, but even more so was the central fireplace in the living room, opening onto an abyss over which the cabin seemed to float in the sky. Bear skins on thick synthetic rugs and dozens of cushions invited us to spend the time lying down, reading in front of the large picture window framing a blue sky.

Martha arranged the roses and carnations in eight vases placed on matching tables throughout all the rooms and compartments. We then prepared a dinner of Canadian salmon fillets.

"I'm reading a biography of Marilyn," Martha said.

"The great harlot," I said, quoting the Bible, "the one who sits upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication."

"Revelation, chapter seventeen."

"Hundreds of preachers associated Marilyn with the great harlot," I nodded.

"I invite you to join me in the living room, by the fire. Choose a book; my parents have a varied library."

After doing the household chores, I examined the shelves crammed with books lining the walls of the living room and dining room. I chose the second volume of Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and immersed myself in its reading until the clock struck midnight.

Then Martha invited me to the bridal bedroom.

One of that room's walls consisted of a large glass pane revealing a panoramic view of Vermont's broken landscape. Wisps of snow covered the pines rising from the nearly perpendicular slopes of the hills.

It was on that Saturday morning that Martha handed me a stack of documents; her face was solemn.

"A secret agent delivered this file to us. It contains everything we know about Monroe's interactions with Kennedy and Castro, as well as our failed invasion of Cuba."

"It's an open secret," I said, weighing whether Martha knew that I had discovered hers.

"We believe Marilyn Monroe may have delivered CIA classified information to Fidel Castro, via John F. Kennedy, in the early 1960s."

"The Bay of Pigs invasion," I nodded.

"We are now certain that her death was motivated by her sexual affair with Castro. They met on several

occasions in the Presidential Suite of the Ritz Hotel in New York."

"Completely shielded from Soviet espionage," I nodded. "The most conspicuous victim of the American cultural industry. How much money did America lose with her apparent suicide?"

"We are struck by your knowledge of history and world politics, Amadeus."

I nodded, drawing close to her tender skin, caressing her cheek, aroused by her calculated praise.

"Your acuity in deciphering historical enigmas could help us," she said, sitting on my lap. "We have already verified your skill in uncovering my secrets, Dr. Miranda."

I blushed slightly and recalled the fire-suppression terminals.

"Cameras?"

Martha nodded calmly.

I smiled ironically and scanned the file for several seconds, my mind racing.

"I will do what I can for the CIA," I promised. "What have you concluded so far?"

"It is almost certain that Monroe, as John F. Kennedy's lover, had access to confidential information regarding the Bay of Pigs operation. It is also true that, as Castro's lover, she provided us with valuable information about Cuban nuclear strategy in the Western Hemisphere."

"If that is so," I replied, "it would refute the stereotype of Marilyn as a licentious, manipulable woman."

"That was precisely her strength," Martha asserted. "Monroe portrayed roles of dumb, lascivious, industrious blondes, but she possessed the intelligence and charisma to attempt world peace in a decade in which our leaders were prepared to blow the world into a thousand pieces."

My pupils darted as I leafed through the file. It showed that Monroe possessed classified information about the operation, just as I now possessed classified information about the CIA through the intimacy of my lover.

"Analyzing Castro, you can be certain that he himself arranged to have her killed or denounced," I speculated while reading sections of the document's conclusion.

"Could you expand on that hypothesis?"

"Castro, like all tyrants, has no regard for those who dare to curry favor with him, least of all those who deliver to him the heads of his enemies."

Martha paced pensively across the room before the glass, her semi-nude silhouette outlined against my sheets, beneath a blue sky torn by snow-covered mountain peaks.

"A traitor would explain the CIA's repeated failures against him," Martha murmured. "It is possible Castro made a secret pact with some ambitious bureaucrat. Denouncing Marilyn would have ensured his promotion; and once director of the CIA, in gratitude for handing Marilyn over to us, it is more than likely that he delivered secret information to Fidel about our plans to assassinate him."

"Fidel's principal motive for betraying her was not owing favors to a lover, Martha. Castro is of the same caliber as Julius Caesar, who ordered King Ptolemy of Egypt killed after he delivered Pompey's head."

"Caesar at least loved Cleopatra," Martha dissented. "But I accept that tyrants study and imitate other tyrants."

"They found her dead in her bed, with her hand on the telephone."

Martha looked at me, puzzled.

"It is a verse by Ernesto Cardenal about Marilyn; her betrayal was silenced under the appearance of suicide. But were the Americans responsible, as has been believed until

today? These documents indicate that it may have been the Cubans or the Russians."

"What they indicate," Martha replied, pouring me a whisky, "is that Marilyn sacrificed herself without personal ambition. Her courage led her to seek world peace, even at the cost of being constrained by the patriarchal power structures of her time."

"It is a shame that she had to resort to sex to achieve it."

"I do not believe, with all due respect to Marilyn," Martha scoffed, "that this was her most difficult task. Monroe delivered the information to Castro at the Ritz, in full view of the spies who besieged her; concluding that the invasion of Cuba would fail because of her was a matter of simple arithmetic."

"The United States had never been so publicly humiliated in an intervention in a Latin American country."

"Monroe's involvement in this affair did not go unnoticed," Martha reflected, "even if it was silenced under the appearance of suicide."

"Do you mean Ernesto Cardenal's poem?"

"It is very paternalistic," Martha replied. "Marilyn Monroe restored peace to humanity, and it is our duty to recognize and honor her."

"And the ten horns which you saw on the beast," I quoted mentally from the Book of Revelation, "these will hate the harlot, and will make her desolate and naked. Modern James Bible, Revelation 17:16."

After two years as lovers, Martha's path and mine diverged when her superiors—no doubt fearful of the reports she herself submitted about our conversations—sent her to New Orleans.

In 2003, with the involuntary help of a Cuban double agent I met at the University of Salford, near Manchester, I

reconstructed the missing pieces that corroborated Monroe's secret attempts at world peace.

It is not clear whom she seduced first, Kennedy or Castro; my conclusion is that she did so simultaneously, in order to avoid suspicion.

My access to classified documents from Havana was fundamental in tracing Monroe's secret stratagem for world peace, as well as her sacrifice in exposing herself to the wrath of the leaders of the warring factions in the Americas during the Cold War: John F. Kennedy and Fidel Castro.

For just as Marilyn delivered information to Castro about the Bay of Pigs invasion, it was Marilyn who delivered checkmate to Fidel, the USSR, and all socialism by exposing that their missiles in Cuba would take up to two months to become operational. The official history—that of a double agent in Moscow who died transmitting this information—was either a parallel report or a smokescreen to conceal Marilyn's intrigues.

This discovery shakes the world of history to its core and reshapes Monroe's life and legacy. It also opens new debates about the role of women on the stage of history and about the power dynamics hidden behind the scenes.

One can only ask whether Marilyn truly intended to sacrifice herself for humanity, or whether her secret ambition was to become a mediator between communists and democrats. Perhaps, once again, the Bible best illuminates this question:

> *"And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."* Modern James Bible, Revelation 17:18

The Queen Mother

The telegram had been written in impeccable English, which is why I left the offices of the newspaper *El Siglo* around three in the afternoon to take a taxi to the Tequendama Hotel.

Half an hour later, at the far end of the lounge adjacent to Avenida del Dorado, I noticed a series of folding screens separated by semicircular half-open doors; one of them led to a corridor lit by rays of sunlight that gently filtered in through the tall windows.

A deathly pale palm touched my cheeks. "I am the Queen of England," an old woman with blue eyes told me. "I knew Hitler, who tried to seduce me four times. My biographers will confirm the truth of my words. He died calling me the most dangerous woman in Europe. The last title they allowed me to hold was Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cork."

I noticed that her left hand remained stiff inside the pocket of her coat. "Where is your kingdom?" a bald man beside her grumbled. "I lost it," the old woman howled, flashing a row of gold teeth. "You already know that, Gregorio. My maid assumed my identity to replace me during the bombing of London. It was a plot by my family, after they discovered that my mother had also been a maid."

"If you keep insisting, they'll take you for crazy." "I'm telling the truth," the old woman snapped at me, "and as proof, I'll reveal a secret of our lineage." "It would be enough for them to hear you in your British English," the bald man muttered sardonically. "You may have heard," the old woman continued in perfect Oxonian English, "that my ancestor, Queen Jezebel of England, ordered the execution

of Mary Stuart, and that our executioner beheaded her in a single clean stroke, raising her skull into the air, which immediately rolled across the ground. They say it was a wig! Well, only royalty knows the true, cruel, and morbid facts. Mary cut her own hair before the execution so that her archenemy would not have the pleasure of hoisting her worm-eaten head before her flatterers! A practice in which, they say, Jezebel indulged until she reached orgasms of pleasure. Upon learning of her victim's ruse, my royal ancestor then popularized the wig story—that is, the version that Mary had always been bald: the worst insult for a woman, before and after her death."

The bald man immediately escorted the supposed queen back to her room. I wanted to follow them, but a bodyguard I hadn't noticed until then stepped in and led me back to the exit. "Who do you work for?" I demanded. "For Senator Ferouche," he replied mechanically. "Doña Petronila, his mother, suffers from delusions and fits of madness. She often calls journalists to this hotel to give testimony of her ravings." "They're quite convincing," I replied.

Consequently, the next morning I published a chronicle about the English royal family, citing the case of a Bogotá woman who claimed to be the Queen Mother. Whether because of *El Siglo*'s limited circulation or the scant interest the British royal family arouses in a country as democratic as Colombia, my article went practically unnoticed.

From that day until her death in 1997, the members of Bogotá's Country Club treated Isabel, widow of Camoes, as Her Majesty Queen Jezebel The Queen Mother. Every foreigner who met her ended up—if not fully persuaded—at least intrigued by her behavior, and there was no shortage of Englishmen who knelt in her presence.

I recall that on one occasion a certain British ambassador threatened to send a letter of protest to the Colombian government for our complicity in what he considered the delusion of an impostor. As far as I know, the letter was never written, and the ambassador—undoubtedly because of his imprudence—was discreetly transferred to Buenos Aires.

Pablo Neruda, Latin poet

Ah, in that moment,
my heart, a dream
with its terrible wings covered you.

Neruda

In the small town of Parral, Chile, a fourteen-year-old boy named Pablo Neruda was preparing for a Latin exam. Pablo was deeply in love with his teacher, Miss Raulina, a beautiful and cultured woman. His wish was to impress her with his knowledge, longing to earn her admiration.

Pablo had diligently studied the adjectives of the third declension and memorized the syntactic analyses of several Latin proverbs.

On the day of the exam, Pablo was nervous, yet eager to demonstrate his abilities. When his turn came, Miss Raulina asked him:

—Give us the syntactic analysis of the proverb:

Audaces fortuna iuvat

Pablo answered confidently:

—*Audaces*: subject; *fortuna*: direct object; *iuvat*: verb. *Audaces fortuna iuvat*: Fortune favors the bold.

Miss Raulina nodded approvingly. Then she posed the next question:

—Now the syntactic analysis of the proverb:

O vita, misero longa, felici brevis

Pablo once again gave the correct answer.

—Oh life, long in misery, short in happiness!

Miss Raulina felt pleased by his knowledge.

—Very good, Neruda —she said with approval—. You are a very advanced student.

Pablo smiled, happy to have impressed his beloved teacher. But his joy quickly faded. At the end of the exam, Miss Raulina said to him:

—Pablo, since you spend so much time writing verses, you will analyze this last sentence to prove to us that you are not some little madman:

Aut insanit homo, aut versus facit

Pablo turned pale. It was the only sentence from the textbook that he had not studied.

He made an effort to improvise.

—What sickens man is everything that confronts him —he replied in a trembling voice.

—I already gave you a hint —Miss Raulina corrected him, surprised—. It is a saying from Latin comedy that translates as: either he is mad or he writes verses.

The class burst into laughter, seized by the hilarity that the irony provoked.

—How is it possible that you chose to memorize instead of analyze the assigned sentences, and failed such a simple one…?

—I'm sorry, miss —Pablo said, tears running down his cheeks—. I skipped it.

—Well, it doesn't matter —Miss Raulina said—. You passed the exam, like most of the class. Next time you will learn to analyze, not to memorize Latin sayings.

Pablo returned to his desk, humiliated. His classmates laughed at him.

—Either he's mad or he writes verses! Ha, ha, ha!

Pablo felt like a failure.

When classes ended, Pablo ran out of school. He didn't want anyone to see him. He walked home, and when

he arrived, he locked himself in his room. He threw himself onto the bed and cried for hours.

During the following days, Pablo wandered about dejected. He couldn't believe that he had failed the exam and disappointed Raulina. He repeated again and again the phrase *Vita, misero longa, felici brevis*. The words struck him like a punch to the heart: "Life is long in misery and short in happiness." Pablo repeated the sentence, feeling the weight of its meaning.

The years passed. Pablo graduated and went on to university. One night, at the age of nineteen, he learned that Raulina had been murdered in a street robbery. He could not fall asleep. He blamed society for her death, and himself for never having declared his love.

Pablo repeated once more the proverbs from that exam and gave them a new meaning. For a madman or a poet, happiness is love and its illusion; misery is to continue living without that love.

He took a long time to fall asleep, remembering Miss Raulina and how he had disappointed her with his Latin. He repeated the classical proverbs to himself over and over again until, through his tears, Raulina appeared to him in the middle of a dream and asked him what the best translation of *O vita, misero longa, felici brevis* was.

—The love we lived and its forgetting! —Pablo moaned, sensing that he would lose her even in his dream.

He woke up and transcribed the translated—or rather, adapted—line born of his heartbreak. He forged a poem about love and forgetting, sensing that it would be the one that would grant him universal fame.

Pablo became one of the most important poets in the Spanish language; his work was translated into more than thirty languages, and he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1971.

At the end of his days, in Isla Negra, he also knew that posterity would remember him for that verse translated from Latin in a dream.

And he died with the secret of the origin of his immortal line:

Loving is so brief; forgetting, so long

The Maker

Hours after being unfairly fired from his job as administrator at a mattress factory, Marco Lombardo received his severance pay and bought a 2009 Ford Taurus at the dealership run by his friend Eduardo Ciccione on Carrera 27, right next to a Christian church.

"I'll recover the investment driving for Uber," he said while signing the paperwork under Ciccione's approving gaze.

"What happened to your position at the Quintana family factory?" his old childhood friend asked.

"I got tired of sitting around all day," he replied, dodging a confession. "I want to get out and drive."

"Easy enough at our age," Ciccione said with a syrupy smile, then corrected what he already considered ironic by handing over the keys: "Enjoy it!"

Back home, it took him two days to convince his wife that the decision made sense.

"Who's going to pay for the kids' college?" she moaned, unable to understand why the Quintana family would fire him just to give the job to a distant relative fresh out of school.

"You should sue them," she finally said.

"I won't," Marco replied.

"It's an injustice."

"I trust in Almighty God."

"I do too," Patricia nodded, reconsidering her lapse of faith, "but God says, 'Help yourself and I'll help you.'"

"Where did He say that? To whom?"

"I don't know," she stammered. "It's just what people say."

"If there's an injustice, He'll set it right for me."

Marco started driving for Uber, skillfully dodging the roadblocks taxi drivers set up on the main avenues. His strategy was to invite passengers to sit in the front seat; unlike his colleagues, his car wasn't white—it was sky blue—and its windows were 25 percent tinted, giving it the appearance of a private vehicle. His earnings spiked during Holy Week, and life seemed to be taking a new direction.

One April morning his car wouldn't start. Marco called a tow truck and took it to the dealership, where Eduardo Ciccione, peering through a magnifying glass at the fine print of the purchase contract, showed him that the warranty had expired.

He then towed it to the modern auto shop owned by Jules, his old friend from San Pedro Claver School, who turned it over to his best technicians. After more than three hours of inspection, the engineers concluded it wasn't a mechanical issue but an electrical one. They recommended replacing the starter system.

"How much?"

"About three million pesos."

The parts took three days to arrive. The car was repaired, and Marco drove it home. But the next day, the Ford wouldn't start again. Jules's technicians checked it once more and concluded the replacement part was low quality.

"Don't worry," Jules reassured him. "You have our repair warranty. We'll keep looking for a couple of days until we figure it out."

Marco nodded, worried about losing his livelihood. He regretted not having insurance that included a loaner car for mechanical breakdowns. Two days passed, and Jules told him no one could pinpoint the problem.

"The car runs perfectly," he said, "but we take it for a spin around the park, and when we get back it won't start. I'm afraid I'll have to refund what you paid for the part."

Marco took the car to another shop, then another, and a third. After a month, it was back in his garage. No one could diagnose the fault.

One sleepless night, he asked Providence for help, explaining how his money had dwindled with family expenses.

"I need my car fixed," he told Jesus Christ with the kind of faith only those who believe in divine omnipotence can have.

The next day Jules called his cell phone.

"Where's the car?" he asked.

"At home," Marco answered, sensing the excitement in his friend's voice. "Do you know someone who can help?"

"Actually, yes," Jules replied. "An American came by yesterday and said he was a Ford mechanic. I told him about your case, and he asked if he could come see you."

"See me?"

"I gave him your address," Jules said. "He should be there soon. His name's Enrique."

He hung up and waited for the visitor. A few minutes later he saw a white-haired man with blue eyes, dressed in a Scottish wool suit that looked out of place in Bucaramanga's heat.

"Are you the owner of the Ford Taurus?" he asked with a Madrid accent.

"Yes."

"Do you have tools?"

"Yes," Marco replied. "The last mechanic who worked on it asked me to keep them for a few days."

"Perfect! Let's take a look."

"But…" Marco hesitated. "Who's going to check it?"

"I am," Enrique said, lifting his head; only then did Marco notice he was nearly two meters tall.

Marco invited him in and led him to the garage, wondering how an elegantly dressed old man could fix a problem that the city's most advanced shops couldn't diagnose.

"Let's see," the old man said, picking up a precision wrench. With the mastery that revealed his deep knowledge of mechanics, he removed the engine belt and the alternator belt.

Marco went to the kitchen and asked his wife to bring them some lemonade.

"All done!" the old man called when Marco returned to the garage. "I take care not to interfere in the responsibilities of your descendants; one loves them so much that he could spend eternity solving their problems."

The tools were already back in his iron toolbox. Marco pondered the meaning of that warning until he noticed that Enrique's clothes and hands were as clean as when he arrived.

"What are you waiting for?" the old man continued. "Start it."

Marco turned the key, and the Taurus's smooth engine sound reached his ears like the melody of a flute. He drove a lap around the block and, when he parked on the street in front of his house behind a classic vintage car, he saw his wife offering the old mechanic a glass of lemonade.

"Thanks," he declined politely. "But I'm not thirsty. Excuse me—I have an important meeting at my office tonight."

"I don't know how to thank you," Marco said. "How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing," the old man said with a broad smile. "One fixes what one creates."

"Who better to repair this car than the engineer who designed them?" Patricia chimed in. "While you were driving, Enrique told me he's the one who produced them."

The old man said goodbye and climbed into a matte-paint Ford Model T.

As Marco started his car again, he had the strange feeling that he was living a dream.

"What's your last name?" he asked, gripping the window.

"Ford!" the old man said. "My name is Henry Ford."

And he disappeared into the streets of the city.

On Reading and Meditation, According to Buddha

Upon arriving in Madurai, I caught the love the faithful felt for their divinity and left my hotel barefoot, heading toward the temple. Half an hour later the pain in the soles of my feet was sharp, though bearable by virtue of my devotion. My body protested, diverting my elevated thoughts to confront the small stones that were embedding themselves in my shallow calluses. A devotee of Sri Meenakshi took pity on my gestures and told me that, just a few blocks away, I would find shops selling Chinese sandals.

I hurried off in distress, eager to return to the temple to meditate, when I stopped before a shop selling trinkets and fake antiques. What caught my attention was the calm gaze of a Buddha about fifty centimeters long, reclining on a stone. I went in and examined the statue without asking permission.

A middle-aged man with a pronounced belly and heavy earrings emerged from thick cotton curtains and assured me it was a Thai statue from the seventeenth century.

"I bought it from a Frenchman who auctioned off his belongings before returning to Paris," he told me. "It includes a wooden tablet."

The vendor showed me a wooden tablet with phrases inscribed in the Thai alphabet.

"What does it mean?"

"If you wish to know," he said with a satisfied smile, "read and act in the world, my disciple; and if you wish to attain the truth, meditate and withdraw from the world."

I realized that study does not necessarily lead to truth, and I understood the deep satisfaction of so many gurus who, through meditation, appear more confident and fulfilled than any PhD from Oxford or Princeton. The reclining Buddha bore delicate carvings depicting Krishna advising Arjuna.

"One who lives, reads, and meditates confronts, on the path to Nirvana, the abyss of every sense."

I wanted to ask the price of the statue, but when I looked up the guru had disappeared; in his place I saw the face of a mature woman. She did not speak English or French, so I took my leave in my halting Tamil, promising myself I would return later.

I had forgotten the pain in my feet, and so I returned to the temple of the gods Sri Meenakshi and Sundareshvara, where I spent the afternoon.

The next day, after dreaming that the gods abandoned me in a labyrinth that was this world, I returned in search of the reclining wooden Buddha, but—whether through forgetfulness or because it had been an illusion—I was unable to find the shop again.

The Martyrdoms of John Lennon and Princess Diana

To Mauricio Rodríguez SJ
Genuinus discipulus Iñigi

In the 1960s, a rock band called *The Beatles* became a global sensation. Their songs, which spoke of peace, love, and justice, resonated with people all over the world.

One of the members of the band was John Lennon, a charismatic and eloquent man who quickly became a spiritual leader for many.

John Lennon was born into a humble family in Liverpool. From a very young age, he showed a strong interest in music, religion, and philosophy. As he grew older, he realized that the world was full of injustice and suffering. He decided to dedicate his life to fighting for a better, more just, and more equitable world.

His songs, which preached equality and brotherhood among all human beings, drew multitudes of followers.

Among John Lennon's admirers was a woman named Jezebel II, Queen of England. Jezebel was a cruel and ruthless woman who tolerated no dissent and longed to rule the world.

On a spiritual level, she was the reincarnation of Jezebel and Salome, the latter the daughter of one of Herod Antipas's lovers. Jezebel was an ambitious and manipulative woman, willing to use her beauty to get what she wanted, eliminating anyone who stood in her way.

Jezebel secretly loved John, but he did not return her feelings. She became his greatest fan—until the day John publicly humiliated her, forcing her to spin her jewels in the

air like a slave, provoking the laughter of her subjects, mocking her privileges, and making her feel ridiculous.

From that day on, Jezebel swore revenge.

One night, Jezebel planned a trap for John Lennon. She invited him to a private concert, and on his way there, two thugs attacked and beat him. John Lennon was humiliated and injured, but he survived.

Jezebel did not give up. Her chief of protocol found a man obsessed with John Lennon's compositions, Mark David Chapman, whom they nicknamed *the Lunatic*, and whom her spies manipulated through exclusive-frequency waves, sending him voices that identified themselves as the voice of Jesus, inducing him to carry out the murder.

In his desire to achieve peace for his nation, John Lennon then met with a group of IRA terrorist leaders, to whom he said that seeking peace through violence was an absurdity.

Jezebel learned of the meeting and organized a secret conspiracy with her agents.

The Lunatic approached John Lennon and asked him for an autograph. Having obtained that gesture of kindness from the prophet, he walked away and returned to fire four shots at him with a handgun.

John Lennon died shortly afterward.

After the Lunatic claimed that he had done it because he heard the voice of Jesus ordering him to do so, the case was closed. The Lunatic was confined to an asylum, where, through repeated electric shocks, he was turned into a human vegetable.

John Lennon's death was a devastating blow to his fans. Many of them believed he was a martyr and that his death was the omen of a dark future.

Jezebel, for her part, secretly celebrated John Lennon's death. Her doctors assured her that, with their

advanced and lavishly subsidized medicine, they would make her live two hundred years. She firmly believed that no one would ever again oppose her claim to the throne of the world.

Until her eldest son got married.

Princess Diana was a kind and compassionate woman who cared deeply for others. She had fallen in love with John Lennon's ideas and dared to apply them as the future queen of England. Jezebel II grew jealous of the nation's love for Princess Diana and, even more so, of its veneration for the idealistic John Lennon. Therefore, as soon as she learned that Diana was seeing one of her lovers in Paris, she ordered her assassins to cause her death in an accident.

The death of Princess Diana was a devastating blow to the people of England. However, their attachment to the institution Jezebel represented led the British to grant their monarch the benefit of the doubt, absolving her of the overwhelming evidence that demonstrated her guilt.

Jezebel lived freely for twenty years, unaware that John Lennon was the incarnation of John the Baptist and that, as such, he had come to announce the Messiah and to die for the truth before His return.

In 2012, the Queen learned through her Australian agents of a prophet whom Hindus recognized as Krishna the Immortal.

The Queen watched videos of Jesus reincarnated in a man from Latin America named Petrus, speaking before a multitude of followers. His calm expression and bold judgments, in which he denounced the absurdities of the world's political organization, seemed to move the audience. His followers believed he was a prophet sent by God to save the world and establish a Kingdom of Peace.

It was the year 2013, and the world was in a state of chaos, amid climate change.

Queen Jezebel II was terrified by Petrus's popularity, as he presented himself as the incarnation of *Petros Romanus*, living in unity of thought with the risen Christ. She feared that his message of peace and unity threatened her power.

Therefore, Jezebel ordered his death. That night, the Queen descended from a helicopter alongside Daniel Craig, the actor who portrayed James Bond, 007, before the applauding television cameras of the BBC.

The first spy, an Irishman named Ángel, was to travel to Petrus's wedding, to which he had cleverly invited himself. But just before departing, Ángel's only daughter hanged herself, leaving a note in which she blamed her father for her traumas.

Convinced of Petrus's guilt—whom her advisors saw as the Prosperous Prince foretold by Shakespeare—Jezebel then ordered that he be tortured and murdered, and that his body be hung in the public square as a warning to all who dared challenge the holder of the Crown of England. However, none of her spies accepted the order. They feared that the accused was truly a prophet of God on earth and told one another that the man had caused no harm to their nation, nor was he causing any.

But Jezebel suffered unspeakably every day, especially after Petrus announced on his social media that John Lennon would be vindicated and that his song *Imagine* would become reality in this generation.

Jezebel suspected that this meant the abolition of private property and the end of the privileges of the 1% of humanity over the other 99%.

She immediately gathered and persuaded Americans and continental Europeans to control Petrus's social media.

From then on, he was monitored twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, while the dissemination of his messages was suppressed. A unit was created to prevent him from succeeding as a writer, film director, or actor—professions in which Petrus excelled in seven languages and in seven countries across five continents.

Jezebel waited patiently for a new generation of spies to emerge. The year 2018 arrived, and Jezebel offered Ángel revenge for the loss of his daughter. Ángel suffered because that "Prosperous Prince" boasted of having been protected from attack by God, divining Ángel's abusive intentions through his magical arts.

Ángel assembled his team with *El Rojo*, a twenty-seven-year-old American, son of a Pope, who would meet in Bogotá with *La Lacra*, a fanatical guerrilla follower of leader Gustavo Petro, whom Petrus had offended after publicly denouncing all Colombian guerrilla leaders for their alliances with crime and terrorism.

But God protected Petrus this time, honoring the parable of the wicked tenants of the vineyard:

> *"There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a tower. He leased it to tenant farmers and went away.*
>
> *When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.*
>
> *But the tenants seized the servants; one they beat, another they killed, and another they stoned.*
> *He sent other servants, more than the first group, and they did the same to them.*
>
> *Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'*

> *But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and take his inheritance.'*
>
> *So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.*
>
> *Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"*
>
> *They answered, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."*
>
> (Matthew 21:33–41)

The appointed day was September 6, 2022. The assassins gathered at Palonegro Airport and drove toward the building where Petrus lived, intending to kidnap him and force him to take his own life.

Then, suddenly—such was the will of Yahweh—a storm broke out. The rain was so intense that a mountainside collapsed onto them, burying them for several hours before sweeping them into a river.

The Queen attempted to issue a third order, but the demons she had captivated throughout her life rebelled by divine authority and killed her, smashing her against the ceilings and walls of her office, before the stunned eyes of her chamberlains.

This was the end of Jezebel, the intellectual author of the martyrdoms of John Lennon and Princess Diana.

Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Saint Catherine of Siena, epigraph of the book *I, Peter Romanus*:

> *"Know that on the last day of judgment, when my Son, the Word, comes with my divine Majesty to reclaim the world with divine power, He will not come as a poor child, as when He was born, entering the womb of a Virgin and being*

born in a stable among animals, only to die later between two thieves. Then I hid my power in Him, allowing Him to endure pains and torments as a man—not because my divine nature was separated from His human nature, but because I allowed Him to suffer as a man to amend your sins. It will not be so in this final coming; rather, He will come in power and bring it about in His own person. There will be no creature who does not tremble at the sight of Him, and He will repay each according to what is due.

His appearance will cause tremendous torment and terror in the wicked who are condemned—no tongue could recount it; but in the just, it will awaken fear and reverence with great joy."